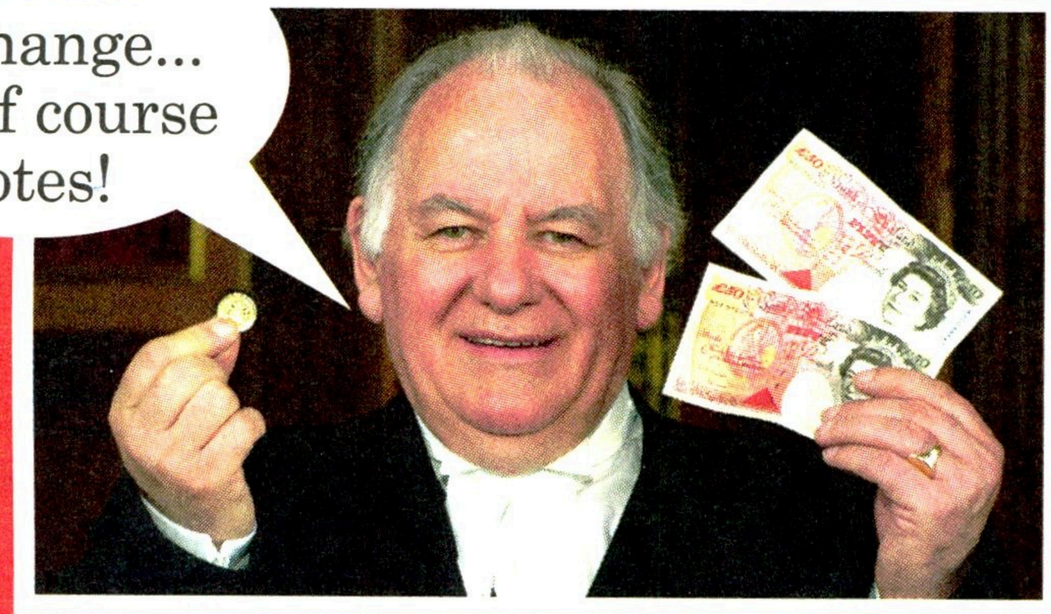
No. 1237
29 May –
11 June 2009
£1.50

PRIVATE EYE

EYE WINS IN COURT! p.6-7

POLITICAL MELTDOWN SPECIAL

SPEAKER QUITS



TORY RESIGNS

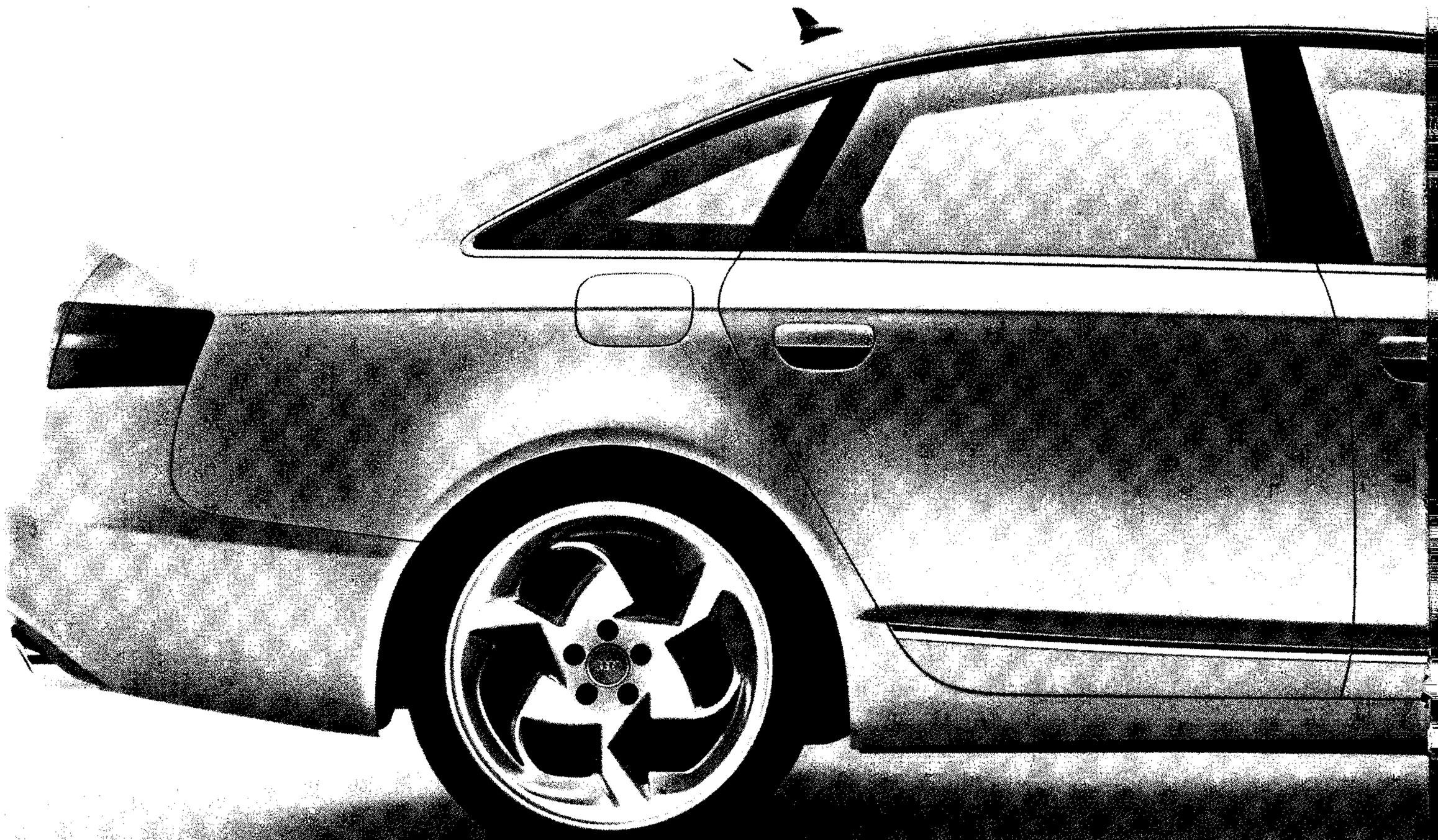
ABSOLUTELY FATUOUS

LABOUR ROT

CHEQUE MATE

COMMONS REMORSE

100 years
Vorsprung durch Technik



Model shown, Audi A6 2.0 TDIe S line at £27,590 ROTR including optional metallic paint (£585). Alloy wheels are for
The fuel efficiency improvements are calculated using official combined mpg figures compared to the equivalent 2.0 TDI 140
each model please visit audi.co.uk. Official fuel consumption figures for the A6 range in mpg (l/100km): from Urban 40.4

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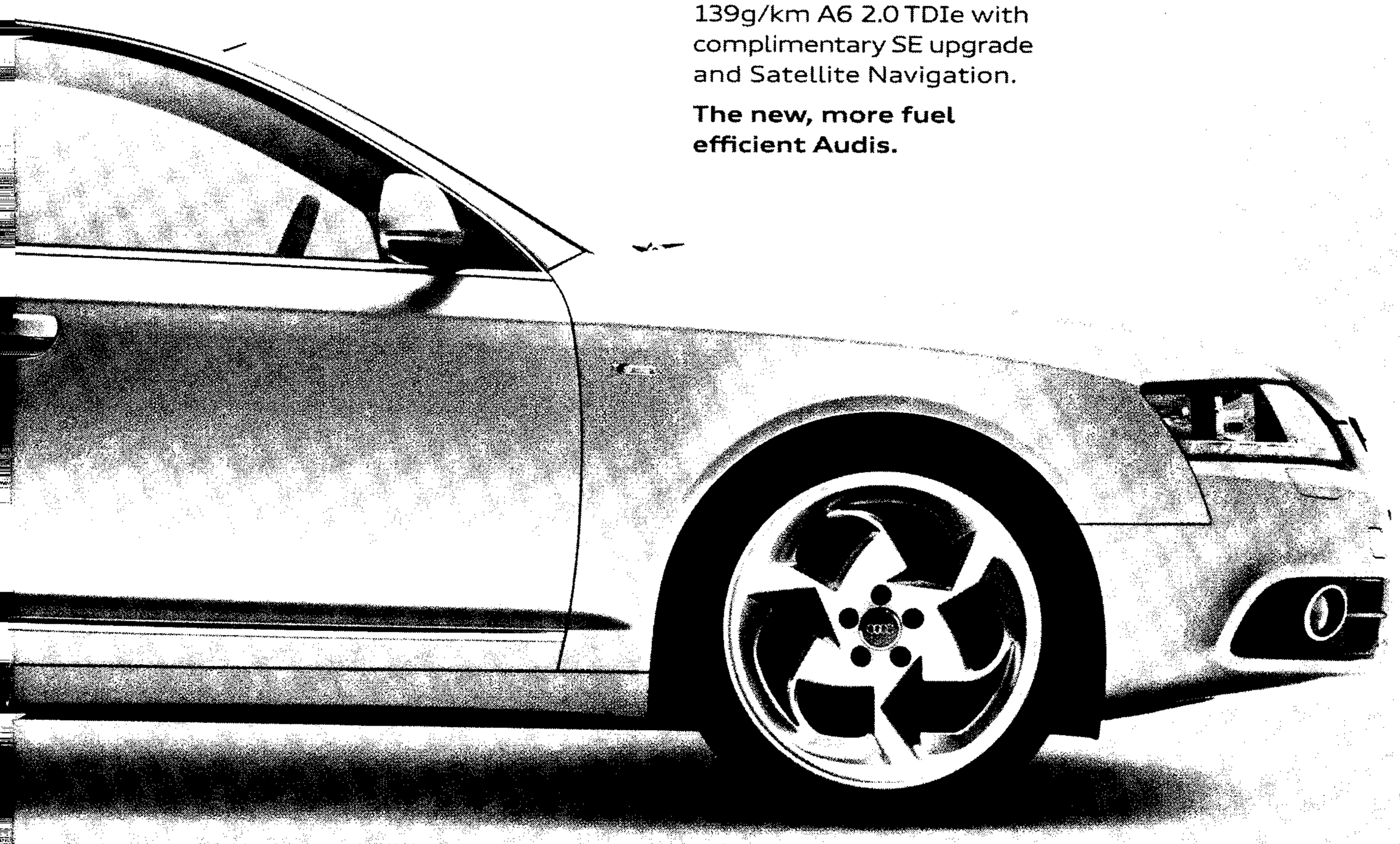

representation only and not available for purchase. 107 miles example is based on the new Audi A6 Saloon 2.0 TDIe SE Manual. PS outgoing model. Fuel consumption can vary with individual driving style. For more details of the improvements in (7.0) – 15.3 (18.5), Extra Urban 65.7 (4.3) – 31.0 (9.1), Combined 53.3 (5.3) – 22.4 (12.6). CO_2 emissions from 139-299 g/km

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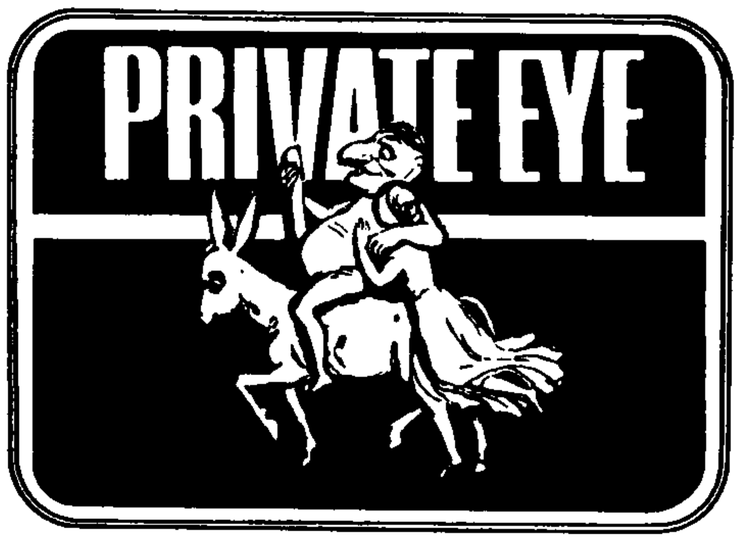

The Commons touch

- The lawyer is an ass: *Eye* win! 6, 7
- A last chance for Polly Toynbee 9
- The Blair Switch Project; an unspeakable Speaker; Mad Nad & more: HP Sauce 10, 12
- Books on a celebrity meal ticket 28
- Cock and bull at the Royal Court 29
- Last orders for pubs; Olympic schmooze bulletin; why scientists are revolting 30, 31

GUESS which MP wrote the following online bulletin to constituents on 13 May: "The topic of the day is, of course, MPs' expenses and many people have asked for comments. Personally, I have of course always scrupulously observed the rules."

None other than Sir Peter Viggers, who a mere seven days later was forced to retire from parliament and spend more time with his taxpayer-funded web-footed friends!

LAST September the *Western Morning News* paid £10,000 damages to Tory MP Anthony Steen, the allegedly Honourable Member for Totnes, and hefty costs to his solicitors, after claiming that he had been a touch sharp with his expenses claims.

Terrified by the menaces of Messrs Carter-Fuck (for it was they), the newspaper apologised for suggesting that Steen had claimed "outrageously excessive, inappropriate and unnecessary financial support from the public purse" and withdrew any implication that the Tory veteran had behaved in a way "unbefitting of an MP".

"We accept that any suggestion that Mr Steen wishes to take advantage of the public purse is wrong," it grovelled. His lawyers were so proud of themselves that they ran a boastful piece about the case in the latest issue of their ridiculous magazine *Get Carter-Fuck*.

Fast forward a few months to the *Daily Telegraph*'s disclosures about Westminster expenses and who do we find under the spotlight? One Anthony Steen, who suddenly announces that he will stand down as an MP after being caught cashing in bigtime, claiming £87,000 for the upkeep of his country estate – including the cost of hiring tree-surgeons, guarding shrubs from rabbits, fencing off fields and moving boulders. Despite grumbling that his critics are simply jealous of his "very, very large house", Steen has now admitted publicly that he "set his own rules" on expenses and has said he will be paying back 10 percent of the money he received because he "got it wrong".

No doubt Steen and Carter-Fuck will now make an apology to the *Western Morning News* and pay back some of the money the paper had to shell out as a result of his legal threats.

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PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
Overseas: +44 (0) 1795 414 870 Fax: 01795 414 555.
Web: www.subsonline.co.uk
Email: private-eye@servicehelpline.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£28 per annum. Europe and Eire £34. Airmail (rest of world) £38.
Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Ten Alps Publishing, 9 Savoy Street, London WC2E 7HR.
Email: private-eye@tenalpspublishing.com
Display: 020 7878 2366 **Classified:** 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by COMAG Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE. Tel 01895 433600.

ABC

100 Years Ago

"A group of earnest Labour MPs, including a couple of 'new men' whose empathy with feminism is unbounded, were discussing their laundry problems. Although they had precious little time to clean their own clothes during the week, they felt uneasy about carrying home a suitcase of dirty underwear to their wives at weekends.

"'I solved that problem years ago,' interjected Michael Martin, the Labour MP for Glasgow Springburn, whose wife lives in the constituency. Instead of arriving on the doorstep with a suitcase of laundry, he explained to his astonished colleagues, he sends his various soiled items home to his spouse through the post – in large brown envelopes, postage paid and 'On Her Majesty's Service', with separate consignments for shirts, socks and underpants."

– *Private Eye*, 28 October 1988.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

4,000 Benefit fraud investigations launched every fortnight

0 Fraud investigations into MPs launched in last fortnight

THERE'S one second home story the *Telegraph* doesn't seem keen on even though it, too, costs the taxpayer a fortune.

Torygraph proprietors Sir David and Sir Fred Barclay protect the wealth that allows them to pay for details of MPs' expenses by living safely out of the taxman's grasp. Not only do they have an address in Monaco, they also boast a gothic castle on Brecqhou, the island off the shore of offshore tax haven Sark. (The castle, incidentally, was designed by the same architect, Quinlan Terry, who built the pile belonging to that other tax-dodging press baron Lord Rothermere – *Eyes passim.*)

The *Telegraph's* commitment to cleaning up democracy is hardly in keeping with the brothers' recent history, either. When elections were held on Sark for the first time last year, the Barclays' favoured candidates fared particularly badly, prompting Sirs David and Fred to withdraw investments in businesses on the island, costing 100 people their jobs in the process.

Just the men to sweep out Britain's Augean parliamentary stables!

UNDER cover of the MPs' expenses scandal those other villains of the age, the bankers, are set to be quietly let off the hook.

A report for chancellor Alistair Darling on "UK international financial services – the future" from former Citibank chairman Sir Win Bischoff , written by a Citibank team, proposes no serious change and even pretends nothing has really gone wrong – it's all just a matter of perception.

Chief among the suggestions is to "reaffirm the UK's [financial industry's] reputation for competence, responsibility and trustworthiness". And of course "regulation should not stifle responsible financial innovation" – even though the "innovation" of such toxic instruments as "collateralised debt obligations" was thought pretty responsible at the time.

The notion of separating such gambling from straightforward banking is dismissed because "the ability of the industry to find solutions to future economic and social problems would be undermined". Things like pensions and mortgages "might require the synergies of the combined model" – even though these have been ruined by the "combined model" of the sort operated by banks like Citibank to the enormous enrichment of Bischoff and chums as the banks they ran headed for multi-billion pound public bailouts.

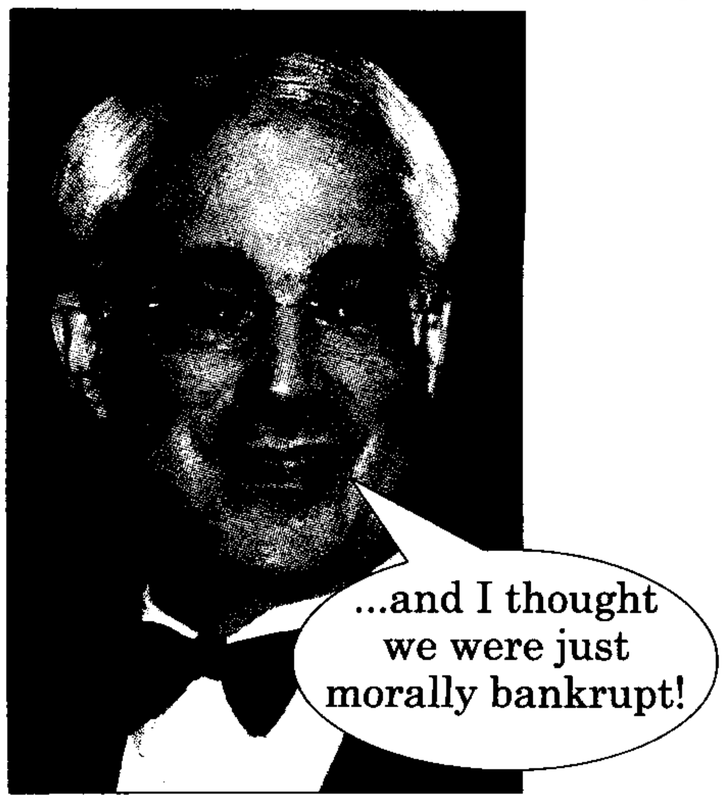
Nor is there much appetite for the bankers to pay for their rescues and taxpayer support. Their tax bills, insist the Citibankers, must remain "competitive" – code for the retention of loopholes like the non-dom exemption. Darling described the report as "laying the groundwork for the UK financial service's long-term future". Which is going to look remarkably like its disastrous past.

THE Commons Treasury select committee has criticised city minister Lord Myners for not coming down hard enough on Sir Fred Goodwin's dodgy RBS pension.

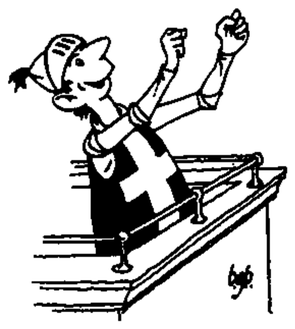
"We suspect that Lord Myners' City background, and naiveté as to the public perception of these matters, may have led him to place too much trust in the RBS Board," say the MPs. "Indeed, in evidence to us he described the RBS Board as 'distinguished'."

Oddly, the committee, led by Brown cheerleader John McFall MP, has yet to utter a single word of criticism of the man who has long believed that characters like Myners were the right people to entrust such matters to: one G Brown.

UK CREDIT RATING SHOCK



PRIVATE EYE WINS CASE!



MICHAEL NAPIER, former head of the Law Society and now a government adviser responsible for regulating lawyers, has just spent an estimated £350,000 in court costs trying to stop *Private Eye* reporting the fact that he has been formally disciplined over a bitter conflict of interest case involving a whistleblower and the huge multinational, Exxon.

Not only did Napier *(pictured right)* and his law firm Irwin Mitchell not want anyone to know that he, along with Ellen Windsor, at the time also a partner at the firm, had been formally reprimanded by the Law Society; they also wanted to stretch the law on confidentiality to keep secret the fact that he and the firm were the subject of a highly critical ombudsman's report into the Law Society's investigation into the affair. Among other things, the ombudsman considered (without reaching any conclusions) whether the investigation may have been affected by the fact that Napier, now a QC and CBE, was a past president of the Law Society and remained a council member.

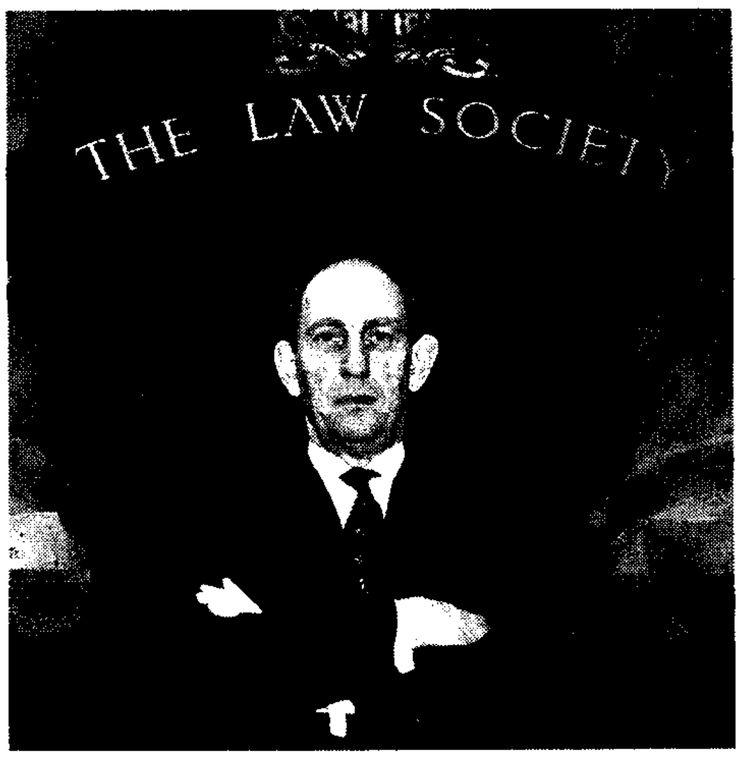
> ***"It is singularly unattractive to argue that confidentiality should be recognised by the law in order to protect the interests of a solicitor against whom an adverse finding has been made."***
>
> *Appeal Court judgment*

Five months after the *Eye* first contacted Napier for his response – only to be slapped with a temporary high court injunction courtesy of Carter Fuck, bizarrely asserting that Napier was protected by "confidentiality" – the court of appeal last week ruled unequivocally in favour of *Private Eye* and press freedom.

"Freedom to report the truth is a precious thing both for the liberty of the individual, and for the sake of wider society, and it would be unduly eroded if the law of confidentiality were to prevent a person from reporting facts which a reasonable person in his position would not perceive to be confidential," said lords justices Toulson, Hughes and Sullivan, ordering Napier and his firm to pay the *Eye*'s legal costs.

"It is singularly unattractive to argue that confidentiality should be recognised by the law in order to protect the interests of a solicitor against whom an adverse finding has been made," they added. The Law Society was carrying out its public duty to "provide a proper means of regulating the profession and maintaining public confidence in it. It was not to protect the reputations of solicitors."

Napier's determination to argue otherwise in the appeal court must call into question his recent appointment by the government to sit on the new Legal Services Board, effectively the lawyers' regulators' regulator. It is not known if he declared his professional sanction before being appointed to all the various official positions he now holds, including one as justice secretary Jack Straw's pro bono envoy, an assessor on the panel currently reviewing civil litigation costs (of which he now has personal experience!) – or indeed before he received his gong.



Michael Napier & Irwin Mitchell v Pressdram

As Lord Justice Sullivan bluntly pointed out during the appeal, Napier's argument for secrecy over the Law Society and ombudsman's findings was "absurd". Subject to libel laws, citizens would be able to publicise their allegations against lawyers and report the fact that they had lodged formal complaints, only to find themselves prohibited from telling anyone the outcome.

As the judge said, commenting hypothetically during the hearing: "A citizen should have the right to shout from the rooftop if he wanted, that a complaint about a solicitor had been rejected because the Law Society were a complete shower investigating one of their own."

Of Napier's assertion that *Private Eye* could report the ombudsman's findings, but only if he and his firm were not identified, the judges said: "It would be bizarre to impose such a restraint in circumstances where *Private Eye* is free to report the result of the Law Society investigation which forms the subject of the (ombudsman's) opinion."

Exxon marks the spot

Napier and Irwin Mitchell's desperate attempt at censorship via judicial process – a luxury only affordable for the rich – reopens the extraordinary Grisham-like thriller that is the case of Michael Ford *(pictured top right)*, a barrister who says he was sacked, abused, bankrupted and ruined by his former client, the massive multinational Exxon, because he refused to take part in a cover-up.

His case was first reported in the *Eye* in June 2003 after Exxon had pursued him with a vengeance when he refused to conceal scientific documents from a Hong Kong coroner investigating two deaths in an explosion in 1992 at a power station, owned and managed by an Exxon subsidiary, Castle Peak Power. More people were seriously injured in the blast.

Following threats, Ford was escorted by police to Hong Kong airport and now lives in England. He was forced into voluntary bankruptcy, losing his home and savings, after being sued by the Exxon subsidiary for breach of confidence in the Hong Kong courts.

His David and Goliath struggle then switched fronts to a civil claim to restore his reputation and career, against the company in the US. Later, in 1997, he also sought to overturn the Hong Kong rulings, by bringing a challenge in the Privy Council in London, the final court of appeal for UK colonies.

He was represented on a pro bono basis by Napier and Windsor. The law lords in the Privy Council did eventually grant Ford the right to an appeal, but referred it back to Hong Kong for hearing – in effect, a victory for Exxon. Not only did recent events suggest he would not get justice there, but the UK was about to lose jurisdiction to the Chinese. Ford had desperately wanted the Privy Council to decide the appeal itself.

There matters may have rested, but Ford was contacted by an *Eye* reader and former Esso franchisee who had read of Ford's struggles with Exxon. He told Ford that at the time Irwin Mitchell was representing him, the law firm was also representing Esso Petroleum, another Exxon subsidiary, in multi-million pound litigation against petrol station franchisees up and down the country. (One test case ended up in the appeal court just before Ford's Privy Council hearing). In Ford's eyes, that Napier and Windsor had not disclosed this apparent conflict cast a whole new light on the handling of his case. "I suddenly realised all the solicitors in the Privy Council that day, including mine, had connections with Exxon," he said. He launched a complaint to the Law Society in 2003, alleging, among other things, conflict of interest.

Both solicitors had strenuously denied any wrongdoing. Napier said he was unaware at the time that another partner was acting for Esso Petroleum and, in any event, even if he had known, he would not have connected that to Exxon and Ford's case, against another Exxon subsidiary.

> ***"A citizen should have the right to shout from the rooftop if he wanted, that a complaint about a solicitor had been rejected because the Law Society were a complete shower"***
>
> *Lord Justice Sullivan during the hearing*

After three years (the Law Society's investigation processes having gone though various incarnations, the latest being the Solicitors' Regulation Authority), the upshot was that many of Ford's complaints were rejected but both solicitors were reprimanded for "a significant risk of a conflict" – although it found this had not affected the way Ford's Privy Council case was conducted.

An appeal panel said it was "inconceivable that Mr Napier, as senior partner, could not have known that in March 1996 that Esso was a major client of the firm and that he would or should have known that Exxon was the parent company of Esso".

Windsor, who mainly handled Ford's case, was also found guilty of a second conflict offence, involving her husband and a company they ran called Dragon International, although other allegations against Napier and Windsor about Dragon were dismissed.

Very early on in his dealings with Irwin Mitchell, Windsor had introduced Ford to her fiancé (later husband), a mysterious "Colonel" Colin Pritchard, said to be ex-SAS, a qualified

Barrister Michael Ford, who says he was sacked, abused and bankrupted after refusing to take part in a corporate cover-up

engineer with power plant experience, and with contacts in government to boot, who Ford agreed could help in his case. Windsor also promised Ford supper with Michael Heseltine, then deputy prime minister, who, she said, was interested in his case.

If that all sounded too good to be true, it was. Although Ford didn't realise it at the time, Pritchard it seems was a fantasist and con man. Only later did Ford discover that Pritchard had never been in the armed forces, let alone the SAS, and that Heseltine had never heard of his case.

Pritchard gathered evidence and put together an "expert" background report on the Hong Kong explosion for Irwin Mitchell. But Windsor blurred the work of Dragon International and Irwin Mitchell, often sending Ford lawyer's notes on Dragon paper. It became clear from documentation in the case that Dragon hoped to make some £750,000-plus should Ford ever succeed in his

> ***Freedom to report the truth is a precious thing both for the liberty of the individual, and for the sake of wider society***
>
> *Appeal Court judgment*

US litigation. Windsor also gave an estimated figure of £750,000 for Irwin Mitchell's fees – far in excess of the £210,000 costs she had actually run up (and a kind of contentious conditional fee arrangement before they were dreamed up). In fact no money ever changed hands because Exxon managed to persuade the US appeal courts to rule that England should be a forum for the case (even though most of the witnesses were in the US) and to dismiss the US action.

The lawyer is an ass

Although Windsor claimed she did not stand to benefit from her husband's involvement, and – since he was now dead and could not respond – she could not be held accountable for anything he may have claimed either financially or about his bogus qualifications and connections, it was decided that she should have advised Ford to seek independent legal advice before agreeing to Pritchard's and Dragon's involvement.

But, according to Ford, many questions about Dragon and Windsor, and indeed what Napier himself knew about the arrangements, if anything, were never pursued. Ford was still unhappy and complained to the Legal Services Ombudsman, who because of Napier's "position of prominence in the Law Society" in turn passed the file to the Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman to investigate.

It reported last December and was, as the appeal court decided last week, "highly critical of various aspects of the way in which the Law Society had handled the complaint". The ombudsman accepted the case wasn't a classic conflict, in that the Esso matters were not directly related to Ford's litigation, but had difficulty with the Law Society panel's conclusion that this was "little more than a technical breach".

The ombudsman found that the original investigation was "blighted from the outset" because of a failure to take statements from key witnesses. Material was also missing from the files and there was a "systemic failure to investigate the complaint in a fair and reasonable manner". It said that rules prohibiting solicitors from acting in conflict situations "exist for the very reason that no client should ever have to wonder if confidential information relating to his case was ever passed to the other side. It may be that no information was passed to Esso, it may be that Esso did not in any way seek to exploit their dominant position as an important client to compromise the manner in which Mr Ford's case was handled, but the fact remains, Mr Ford should never have been placed in a situation where he can never be certain."

The ombudsman's report said a number of matters needed further investigation, including how much Mr Napier, as senior partner, knew about the amount of work for Exxon/Esso his firm had inherited as a result of a merger with another law firm; and whether a conflict search had taken place and, if so, when – a failure to do that could result in a disciplinary offence. The ombudsman also recommended that the Law Society "keep under review the need to raise a further complaint in respect of the two solicitors, if it can be shown their responses to the Law Society were dishonest".

As well as recommending a new investigation, focusing on whether the sanction was appropriate, the ombudsman recommended the Law Society should consider reforming the way solicitors are investigated to eradicate bias, or the appearance of bias, when dealing with complaints about office holders – like Michael Napier.

Get Carter-Fucked

Had Napier and Irwin Mitchell won their confidentiality case, not only would the *Eye* have been unable to report on a case which is clearly in the public interest, it would have jeopardised the reporting of other disciplinary and ombudsmen's rulings.

Since the *Eye* was first silenced by an interim gagging order, pending first a high court hearing, and then Napier's appeal, the Solicitors' Regulation Authority has agreed that the conflict finding stands (although Napier is seeking to reopen that finding). It is to reconsider a number of matters, including whether the reprimand should stand or whether a lesser or higher penalty would be appropriate or whether the matter should be referred to the Solicitor's Disciplinary Tribunal, which deals with more serious complaints. It will also consider what responsibility Napier, as the supervising partner, should bear for Windsor's personal conflicts involving the engagement of Dragon, and the proposed payments to it and Irwin Mitchell, as part of any settlement in the US.

Although the SRA said it did not intend to investigate whether the "significant risk of conflict" affected the way Ford's Privy Council case was handled, the ombudsman has protested, saying that if evidence emerges suggesting there may have been an impact on appeal, that too should be treated as a conduct issue. It is also seeking wider assurances about the independence of any future investigation, not just in this case, but in others where office holders or officials of any self-regulatory body are involved. After all, as matters stand, Napier sits on the Legal Services Board, overseeing an investigation by the Law Society/Solicitors' Regulation Authority, overseeing an investigation concerning… Mr Michael Napier QC CBE.

NEXT ISSUE: ***Esso, Exxon and the barrister who wouldn't play ball: An explosive tale.***

"What's that you've got, Flipper?"

If shoplifters had the same rights as MPs

"You should resign, I've been doing this for years and you haven't stopped me before now"

"£4,000 – expense incurred for psycho-therapeutic counselling which enabled me to appreciate the cause of public anger"

"Damn!"

NUMBER CRUNCHING

2 Paragraphs *Private Eye* originally intended to run on this story before Michael Napier took legal action

2 Pages we are running on it as a result of attempt to gag us

Street of Shame

"THE taxman should go through MPs' claims," opines the *Daily Telegraph*, understandably indignant at Hazel Blears and other members who claim allowances for their "secondary residence" while avoiding capital gains tax by assuring the Revenue that it's actually their primary residence.

Where on earth did Blears get the idea that this sort of jiggery pokery was acceptable? Perhaps from the *Daily Telegraph*, which ran a big feature on 26 June 2007 showing readers how to minimise CGT on the sale of a second home.

"Switch 'principal private residence' exemptions between properties," personal-finance hack Teresa Hunter advised. "If you own more than one home you can elect which you wish classed as your primary residence, provided there is some evidence that you have actually resided there, albeit shortly. If you live for even a matter of weeks at any stage in your 'second' home, this enables you to write off the last three years of capital gains when you come to sell." A top accountant told Hunter that it was possible to "play around with elections for a bit". As the *Telegraph* urged: "Become a butterfly and flit between homes."

Could this delightful, butterfly-like "flitting" by any chance be related to the "flipping" which now makes it so angry?

"MY HUSBAND will be away for three weeks in January so I fancy a trip to a spa. Can you recommend a luxurious one in the UK or Europe?" asked "Sandra, address withheld" in a letter to *Times* beauty editor Sarah Vine for her column "Ask Sarah" published on 12 November 2007.

"Wow, what a treat," Vine replied, before offering suggestions in Austria and Italy. "Closer to home, Pennyhill Park Hotel, in Surrey, has eight indoor and outdoor pools and a huge gym," she wrote. "Spa-wise, the emphasis is on pampering: the spa café supplies all-organic food – but they also have wine and chocolate cake on the menu."

How well-informed Vine was. Can this be the same Pennyhill Park Hotel that her husband Michael "Oiky" Gove MP booked a year earlier, charging the taxpayer more than £500 for a single night's stay, on his Commons expenses during a family house move? It surely can!

The *Times* has been understandably coy about reporting the embarrassing case of Gove, who has been forced to repay £7,000 in Commons expenses which he wrongly claimed for his home in North Kensington. The Commons Register of Members' Interests reveals that the newspaper pays him between £60,001 and £65,000 a year – just as much as his MP's salary – and he has a second contract for an undisclosed sum to write a book for Rupert Murdoch's HarperCollins. It's a wonder he still has time to cook up his expenses.

A MIXTURE of green and red faces at the *Sunday Times* as MPs' expenses exclusives continue to roll in for the *Daily Telegraph*.

Many of the stories carry the bylines of reporter Holly Watt and deputy political editor Robert Winnett. Both were once ensconsed at the *Sunday Times* – Watt only left in the most recent round of redundancies a couple of months ago – and the duo kicked off the entire shebang with their jointly bylined tale of the misdeeds of the Conway family, "MP Hires Son on Expenses", back in May 2007.

At the time the pair had to fight to get the story any prominence at all, the *Sunday Times* newsdesk led by the hapless Nick Hellen having declared that it would have no legs because "no one's heard of him".

"BERLUSCONI fury at revelations about model's properties," the *Times* reported last week, updating the saga of the Italian prime minister and an 18-year-old aspiring model at the centre of his divorce. But the most intriguing information was buried deep in the story, after many paragraphs about the teenager's family connections in Naples.

"Mr Berlusconi, who was speaking after a press conference with Jose Manuel Barroso, the European Commission President, was already angry after a ruling by Milan judges earlier that day in the trial of David Mills, the British tax lawyer," wrote Richard Owen in Rome. "The judges said that they found Mills guilty because he had been given a bribe of $600,000 by Mr Berlusconi to lie on his behalf in corruption trials in the 1990s. Mills was sentenced to four and a half years in prison for perjury but is appealing."

Given that the *Times* is the house journal of the British legal profession, it was surprising it didn't give more coverage to Mills's fate. But a relief, no doubt, to his daughter Eleanor Mills, who happens to be the Saturday editor of the *Times*.

THE *Daily Mail*'s Allison Pearson chose TV presenter Kirstie Allsopp and her new series, *Kirstie's Homemade Home*, as targets for a recent column.

"Kirstie…, shows us grateful plebs how to survive the recession by doing up a dilapidated cottage. It doesn't seem to have occurred to the Honourable Kirstie that most of us haven't got time to cross-stitch the bedroom wallpaper, what with trying to keep the bailiffs from the door."

Has La Pearson something to tell us about her own circumstances? Last time we looked she was earning a salary rumoured to exceed £200,000 from her *Mail* column. She cashed in handsomely from the sale of her first novel (though she is repaying an advance to Miramax for the film rights to a second novel which she hasn't written yet).

"I wish my dad would act more like a grown-up. I mean, he is fifteen"

"REALISTICALLY, it was never going to be young Alfie Patten, was it?" asked *Sun* columnist Jane Moore last week – an opinion her editor Rebekah Wade presumably disputes.

For several days in February, Wade splashed headlines like "Dad at 13", "The Baby Father: Meet Alfie" "I love Alfie and he took my virginity, There's been no one else" and "I'm dad – so zip it" all over her paper until the family courts stepped in and put reporting restrictions on the story.

The last two headlines were in response to claims in that always reliable debunker of *Sun* exclusives, sister paper the *News of the World*, which produced two alternative candidates for fathering young Maisie Steadman. One of those was Tyler Barker, 14, who sure enough was confirmed as the father by the results of the DNA test revealed last week. Unabashed, the *Sun* performed an elegant reverse ferret and emblazoned its front page with the headline "Alfie Baby: The Real Dad" – even popping down the corridor on the scrounge so it could illustrate it with the photo of Tyler which had been exclusively shot by the *Screws* three months before.

HALF-PAGES of both the *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* were cleared on 19 May for a picture of "big-hearted owner Richard Desmond" handing over a minibus to an Essex school.

"We decided to give this bus on behalf of *OK!* readers in the name of Jade Goody as Essex was her area and she loved kids," the proprietor of all three publications was quoted as saying.

Curiously, no space in either paper was found to record another generous handout Mr Desmond made on the same day: £52,500 which he will pay into the public purse as a result of yet more fines from broadcasting watchdog Ofcom on his porn businesses (*Eye* 1217). One penalty, of £27,500, was for broadcasting R18 material which can only legally be sold in a licensed adult sex shop as part of a programme called *Bathroom Bitches* on Television X2. The other £25,000 was for using free-to-view daytime broadcasts on channels such as "Red Hot Fetish" and "Red Hot Just 18" to direct viewers to hardcore websites containing "material [which] has the potential to cause harm to under-18s and children in particular".

Mr Desmond's companies, the watchdog ruled, had violated rules on "the protection of under-18s", the "protection of children by appropriate scheduling" and "generally accepted standards". What would Jade say?

THE *Sunday Express* readership may be falling rapidly (a 6 percent drop in the last National Readership Survey), but even so it's unlikely that just 31 music teachers will be enough to provide a "free singing or music lesson for every reader".

The list of music teachers who will accept the vouchers for the paper's generous offer to would-be *Britain's Got Talent* entrants is very short indeed. No wonder: there doesn't seem to be much in it for the teachers, who were asked to provide the free music lessons for literally nothing. Organisers of the offer emailed tutors, giving them the opportunity to work for no pay, saying it was, er, entirely "*FREE*!"

SWINE FLU panic hit British Airways harder than most, especially since the first person to be tested for the virus in the UK (and subsequently found to be free of the flu) was a British Airways steward taken ill on a flight back from Mexico City.

Following news of the epidemic, shares in BA dropped by more than 7 percent. With that in mind, hacks at BA's *High Life* magazine must have been delighted with their choice of cover story for the month – "The Joy of Mex". Inside the in-flight mag, readers are urged by travel writer Fiona Sims to visit the Latin American country to sample its sizzling street food and take a tour of Mexico City. And her favourite dish? *Cochinita pibil* – pork cooked in banana leaves. Mmmm.

TO broaden the appeal of the *Evening Standard*, Old Etonian editor Geordie Greig has recruited a host of new columnists with the common touch.

Besides Peaches Geldof, they include Emily Sheffield, deputy editor of *Vogue*, whose first column recounted how Brent council had the temerity to tow her car away. In best Polly Filler style, she went on to complain that her four-year-old son hadn't got into any of the four choices they had put down for his primary school.

"Why don't local councils and the government – Labour's had more than 10 years to sort this out, hasn't it? – send us a cheque when they fail my child, fail my neighhours and their children?" Sheffield demanded.

No doubt many Londoners would agree with her – and none more so than her brother-in-law, Tory leader and PM-in-waiting David Cameron.

IN THE *Financial Times* of 12 May, Ian Shuttleworth's review of *Resilience* at the Bush Theatre referred to one character as "a well-meaning but ignorant snob parachuted into a plum job owing to Eton-and-Oxford chumhood with the new boss".

Also in the papers on 12 May: the first theatre review (ever, possibly) by the London *Evening Standard*'s new drama critic Henry Hitchings, whose entry into this plum job – following the ousting of Nicholas de Jongh – is of course entirely unrelated to his common Eton-and-Oxford background with the paper's new editor, Geordie Greig.

● *See Theatre News, p29.*

"I LOVE the Bond films," former KGB spy Alexander Lebedev told an interviewer a few months ago. Now his revamped London *Evening Standard* is marketing itself with the slogan "Tomorrow's News Today".

Sounds familiar? This was the marketing slogan of Elliot Carver, the megalomaniac villain and media tycoon in the 1997 James Bond adventure *Tomorrow Never Dies*. *Standard* hacks are now urgently seeking out DVDs of the film to see what else is in store for them.

"LEWIS Hamilton fears taking a step backwards in Barcelona on Sunday," Matt Butler wrote in *thelondonpaper* on 7 May, "after revelling in his giant leap forward in Bahrain."

Over at the rival freesheet, *London Lite*, meanwhile, Geoff Teather was also turning his mind to Formula One. "Lewis Hamilton fears taking a step backwards in Barcelona on Sunday," Teather revealed, "after revelling in his giant leap forward in Bahrain."

And so they both continued for several more paragraphs, two great minds with but a single voice. Meanwhile, the *Daily Star* had an eerily identical dispatch "from James Murray in Barcelona", as did the *Telegraph* website's offering written by "Rod Gilmour and agencies".

The piece was in fact written by Ian Parkes, sports reporter for the Press Association. Nothing wrong with using agency copy, of course, but why stick someone else's byline on it? As with the *Telegraph*'s ghostly army of imaginary county-cricket reporters (exposed in the last *Eye*), this "churnalism" is a desperate attempt to disguise the fact that, having fired most of their sports hacks, newspapers now rely on two school-leavers and a dog to recycle agency copy and pass it off as their own.

"HOW tax havens helped to create a crisis," declared a sombre op-ed piece earlier this month in the *Financial Times* by Professor Sol Picciotto, an international tax expert who argued that there is a "close link between tax avoidance and the speculation that has fuelled financial instability for 30 years". The existence of so-called secrecy jurisdictions, he added, is "an open invitation to evasion".

This will have been read carefully by the board of Pearson, the *FT*'s parent company, whose chairman Glen Moreno served for nine years until 2008 as a trustee to the Liechtenstein Global Trust, a private bank intimately involved in tax avoidance. When the *Eye* revealed Moreno's past role he was forced to pull out of a job as chairman of the UKFI, the body overseeing the nationalised British banks. But he wants to stay on the Pearson board, despite growing unease within the *FT*.

There are signs that shareholders are also getting restless. Recently a third of them either voted against or abstained on Pearson's remuneration report, which Moreno had approved. Shareholders were angry that the annual bonus targets set for directors, including Dame Marjorie Scardino's £1.3m, were too easy. Perish the thought!

ADRIAN Blomfield, Moscow correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, has been doing his bit for Russian-British relations.

While supping with a gang of hacks in a Moscow bar recently, he floated the idea of founding a "small cock club", saying that at his local sauna he'd seen quite a few Russians who would qualify for membership.

The remark was overheard with some displeasure by a Muscovite who was squiring Deidre Dare, the expat lawyer and erotic novelist. He stormed out of the bar, only to return an hour later, still steaming at this insult to Russian manhood, and demand an apology. When the *Telegraph* man said he wouldn't apologise for what was clearly a joke, he was invited to roll up his sleeves and settle the matter outside. Blomfield declined – whereupon the irate Russian emptied the contents of two vodka glasses into his face.

"REDUCING debt could well become a virility test in the election," the saintly Andreas Whittam Strobes wrote in the *Indie* last Friday, after the US firm Standard & Poor's threatened to slash Britain's credit rating.

"Very early in the day, financial markets are playing a role in the general election due to take place within a year. They have sent a warning. If the winning party fails to reduce the level of government debt more sharply than is currently planned, then the cost of borrowing would rise… Always at the back of dealers' minds is the risk of default."

Alas, the staff of the *Indie* know all about debt and credit ratings. Last week Independent News & Media announced it had struck an emergency "standstill agreement" with banks to allow it an extra six weeks' grace to repay a €200m bond, as it struggles to pass its own "virility test" with about €1bn of debt.

THE announcement that Martin Scorsese was to direct a biopic of Frank Sinatra prompted US gossip website Gawker.com to invite readers to submit their casting suggestions. Gawker kicked off the fun by making a joke one of its own: the black actor Jamie Foxx, who won an Oscar for his portrayal of Ray Charles, could play ol' blue eyes!

Four days on came some hot news on the *Daily Express* website: a "well-placed industry insider" has told them that Foxx is to star as… Ol' Blue Eyes. "Cool is colour-blind. Jamie would seem to be born to the role," the mysterious stranger confides.

Naturally, the third act without which no showbiz nonsense is complete swiftly followed: tabloid funsheet the *Daily Telegraph* rushed to follow up this hot scoop. "Jamie Foxx 'in the running' to play Frank Sinatra," the paper's website trumpeted at 4:24am on 18 May. "It will be one of the most prominent examples of 'colour-blind' casting in Hollywood history," the paper notes, helpfully managing to add its own touch of blindness by misspelling Scorsese's name throughout.

I LOOKED OVER JORDAN AND WHAT DID I SEE…

"There were rumours that their relationship was on the rocks. Will Katie be talking to Peter? Will Peter be talking to Katie? As it turns out, all our fears are unfounded – rather like those whispers of an impending break-up. After an exhilarating day with the couple, we can confirm that their relationship is as solid as Pete's legendary six-pack." – ***News of the World*, April 2009.**

"Today, the *News of the World* uncovers the shocking truth behind glamour queen Jordan's split from long-suffering husband Peter Andre. The marriage of Britain's most famous fantasy girl pin-up has been virtually sexless for two years. Last night in an emotional confession to pals, 36-year-old singer Peter said: 'I've been saying for a long time it was a case of 'when' not 'if' we divorced. The relationship's been going under since 2007 but I was terrified of missing the kids'." – ***News of the World*, May 2009**

"Jordan today reveals what made her suspect hubby Peter Andre was cheating on her – he spiced up their sex life. But then he explained he was just pumped up by his training for the London Marathon, and now the randy couple say they are making love more than ever: 'All I can say is our sex life is very active now. It's hit its peak again'." – ***Sun*, April 2009.**

"Jordan refused hubby Peter Andre sex for four months before announcing their divorce. The busty model, 30 – who fell in love with the singer, 36, on TV's *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here* – told him she was exhausted by horse-riding and workouts, pals revealed." – ***Sun*, May 2009.**

IN A flashback to the glory days of Princess Diana, rival crews from the tabloids do battle in the Maldives to be the first to bring their readers photographs of the broken-hearted (and topless, naturally) Jordan following her split with husband Peter Andre.

As the crew from the *News of the World* chug towards the glamour model's secluded beachside villa in a rented speedboat, long lenses at the ready, on dry land *Sunday Mirror* hackette Kate Mansey sees all the plans she has carefully laid over the previous three days about to turn to dust.

She swiftly alerts Mrs Andre's security team that there are photographers in the vicinity – only to watch in horror as they pounce instead on the *Sunday Mirror*'s own snapper, who has donned his flippers and snorkel and is at that very moment approaching the shore armed with a waterproof camera ready to strike!

"Isn't it sad when a couple splits and all the people who love them have to take sides"

THE BLAIR SWITCH PROJECT

TONY BLAIR and accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers jointly helped push through a rule change in 2004 that brought the MPs' expenses scandal to the heart of government. Without Blair's new rule, explicitly designed to boost ministers' expenses, many of the current frontbench embarrassments would not now be an issue.

The Senior Salaries Review Board looked at MPs' pay, using a survey of MPs prepared by PwC, and the firm was happy to support a point that *Private Eye* understands was pushed by the Prime Minister. Its report said: "There were comments made about the rules which require ministers and other paid office holders to elect their London residence as the main residence and the constituency as their second property. The rules mean that the ACA [Additional Costs Allowance] is used against costs on a property which in many cases has been owned by the MP and his or her family for a significant number of years and where the mortgage is typically low."

The report makes it clear ministers complained that because they were deemed to live in London, they could not "flip" homes in order to claim higher expenses; they could only claim on their generally cheaper properties outside the capital. According to the review board, the rule was dropped in February 2004.

Hazel Blears' property ladder, Maria Eagle's flipping, Caroline Flint's new London flat, the bulk of Shahid Malik and Shaun Woowdard's expenses and Kitty Ussher's war on "bad taste" Artex all depend on the 2004 rule change, as do the bulk of Gordon Brown's own additional costs claims.

The Commons members' estimates committee of senior MPs told *Private Eye* that it changed the rule in February 2004, reflecting the concerns in the PwC report.

The former PM's support for the change was no random act of greed (indeed, Blair did not personally use the change to raise money himself, relying instead on a complex mortgage transaction on his constituency home.) He was actually trying to increase his ministers' income while publicly appearing to keep a lid on their headline pay.

He did so by following a model set in 1985 by Margaret Thatcher, who, trying to hold back public sector pay and wanting MPs to appear to set a good example to teachers and the like, had introduced the crucial change in the Additional Costs Allowance which allowed MPs to begin claiming their mortgage costs rather than simply hotel bills or rents. Thus began the great Westminster property speculation game – Blair simply extending the perk to his London-based ministers who were always whingeing that they didn't earn enough.

HOW should MPs who have profited from flipped and tarted-up-on-expenses homes repay the taxpayer? Writing cheques to HM Revenue and Customs for random sums they've dreamed up doesn't seem very satisfactory.

Happily there is already a model, devised by MPs: the discount rules in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 for social housing tenants who sell their properties after purchasing under right-to-buy.

Tenants who sell within the first year of purchase have to repay the discount in full. Four-fifths must be repaid if a sale is made in the second year, three-fifths in the third year, two-fifths in the fourth year and one-fifth in the fifth year, after which a property can be sold without repaying any discount.

The payback rule for MPs could be set so that monies are paid back on a sliding scale of, say, 10 percent of profits for every year up to 10 years.

Among those who would be hit hard by such a rule change would be Geoff Hoon, who established a property empire worth £1.7m. Other names on the long list of cabinet ministers and MPs who would have to repay tens of thousands include Yvette Cooper, Ed Balls, Hazel Blears and gorgeous, pouting former housing minister Caroline Flint. Kerr-ching!

CALLED TO ORDURE

WHAT crocodile tears were shed after the glorious obliteration of the Commons Speaker. The day after Michael Martin accepted the inevitable and announced he would resign in June, relieved MPs continued to rush up to his chair to show their solidarity.

Among them was health secretary Alan Johnson, who gave Martin a handshake and a fraternal wink. Can this be the same Alan Johnson whose "friends" just two days earlier had been putting it about that he thought his brother trade union veteran Martin was a complete liability in the Commons chair? It certainly can be, folks!

Labour whips are furious that they have lost their pet Speaker. Feeling the loss most keenly is John Spellar, who led the applause for Martin in the Commons lobby on the day of his resignation. The entire whips' office lined up like a cricket team clapping a batsman off the pitch at the end of a big innings.

Spellar, a hard-nut shop steward, had long plotted with Martin groupies to keep the freedom of information act at bay and ensure that the whips' backbench lobby donkeys got their full entitlements. With chief whip Nick Brown going on Radio 4 to say that "Michael was one of us" and another whip, Barbara Keeley, in tears at his departure, Labour's party managers are no longer bothering to pretend that they saw Martin as a genuinely non-partisan figure - which is, after all, the whole point of the Speaker.

Martin was seen not just as "one of us" in the chamber and the Fees Office, the Commons expenses fountain over which he presided with such benign grace. Labour class warriors regarded the former steel factory convener as a symbol of their swagger over the political system. Having now seen Martin explode so messily, Labour's heavies are proving bad losers.

Backbenchers who stabbed Martin in the front have been booed and hissed in the chamber. Political hacks who wrote about the Speaker with insufficient respect have been called "racist" and Jim Sheridan (Lab, Paisley & Renfrewshire North) has demanded that such journalists be expelled from the Palace of Westminster for "abusing the facilities".

The response from Martin's mafia to this setback suggests that if Labour doesn't win the next general election, we could have a job dragging them out of Downing Street.

The person who has really pissed off the old Speaker's thugs is Labour MP Gordon Prentice (Pendle), who was the first to stick in the knife in the chamber on the day before his resignation. Prentice collaborated with Tory backbencher Douglas Carswell (Harwich), and shortly before the two men attacked Martin in front of a packed chamber, they were to be seen in deep discussion with one another in the corridor just behind the Speaker's chair. Perhaps they were discussing the pressure and abuse they were encountering for organising a motion of no confidence in Martin.

Prentice sits for a Lancashire seat but he is a Scot, educated in Glasgow. This wrecked the whips' absurd case that all the criticism of Martin was being got up by English public school toffs. The voters of Pendle may recognise Prentice's courage; but if he manages to hold on to the marginal seat, it will not be thanks to any help from the Brownite party machine.

When Betty Boothroyd stood down as Speaker in 2000, the same Gordon Prentice organised hustings for the large number of candidates for the Speakership. The one person who refused to take part? Mick Martin. If he had been exposed to examination in front of MPs at that point, he might have betrayed his inability to string a sentence together.

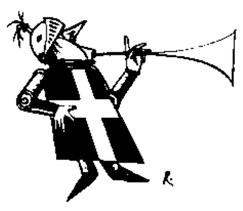
Speakers, by custom, have to be dragged to the chair - a symbol of the reluctance they are meant to show. Yet Martin had long been campaigning for the job. How can we be sure of that? The morning after Martin and his Glaswegian machine politics had won him the Speakership, Martin came across Prentice in the Commons tea room. "Ah, Mr Hustings," he said sarcastically. "This was where I held my hustings," he added, pointing to the Tea Room tables.

This was a Speaker, let us remember, who not only hired Carter-Fuck as his official spokesmen (running up a characteristically hefty bill for the taxpayer), but who was also proposed and seconded by those fine upstanding figures, Peter Snape (now Lord Snape, one of the peers investigated by the *Sunday Times*) and Ann Keen (since outed as one of the most notorious expenses claimers in the Commons). In their speeches on 23 October 2000, they spoke at length about Martin's Glaswegian upbringing. Snape almost pulled out an onion as he claimed that Martin had first gone to work in "a second-hand boiler suit and a pair of boots" and praised his "even temper" – something which often deserted him over the next nine years.

Snape went on to attack "a media obsessed with plots, counter-plots and tittle-tattle" and even made a wisecrack about journalists who "put the wrong name on their expense accounts". As we now know, it was not just hacks who fiddled their exes.

'Gavel Basher'

EYE TOLD YOU SO



LUTON SOUTH MP Margaret Moran already faces deselection by Labour after spending £22,500 expenses on dry rot at her partner's home in Southampton.

But this week she will also face questions from party bosses about her use of parliamentary staff and resources for eQuality Networks, the company she chairs, after papers leaked to the *Financial Times* showed that parliamentary staff wrote funding applications for the business.

Could this be the same eQuality Networks for which Moran's parliamentary interns were expected to provide free labour? In 2006, *Eye* 1173 revealed that young people working unpaid to gain political experience were being set to work for the not-for-profit business instead. At the time, angry letters from her office demanded to know the source of our story and dismissed the claims as "defamatory and preposterous", before eventually claiming that interns had been "keen to get involved" in working for the firm.

HOUSE OF CONMANS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

CAPITAL GAINS

"WESTMINSTER," says Gordon Brown, "cannot operate like some gentleman's club." Yes, Prime Minister. But, as in any crusty Pall Mall club, any attempt to change the rules in a way members don't like meets with serious ill will.

So it proved earlier this month, when the government tabled a vote to rescind the second home allowance for the 49 MPs with constituencies in outer London. Even though the reform was a significant face-saving exercise for MPs claiming for central London pads just a few miles from their main residences, 15 of the 49 failed to show up for the vote, and two who did voted against the measure.

High-profile Labour no-shows included Nick Raynsford (Greenwich & Woolwich) and John McDonnell (Hayes & Harlington), although neither had claimed the allowance themselves. Ann Keen (Brentford & Isleworth), the health minister who claimed more than £18,000 in 2008 for her central London home, also failed to turn up. The whips proved more successful with West Ham MP Lyn Brown. In 2008, Ms Brown claimed nearly £16,000 to rent a flat in central London, even though her main home in Plaistow is less than 11 miles from Parliament. (She tells the *Eye* she has safety fears about travelling to her constituency address late at night.)

The turnout, or lack of it, was even more embarrassing for David Cameron. His attempts to convince Tory MPs of the need for reform seem to have fallen on deaf ears, with even senior members of the party such as Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford & Woodford Green) and Eric Pickles (Brentwood & Ongar) playing possum. The Tory members for Orpington, John Horam, and Bromley & Chislehurst, Bob Neill – who both live within 20 miles of Westminster and claim £15,478 and £19,108 respectively – also declined to present themselves in the lobby at the crucial moment. Also absent was Croydon South's Richard Ottaway, who lives 15 miles from parliament but claimed nearly £22,000 for a second home in 2008. Good show!

Taking the biscuit – as well as £15,478 for "staying away from home" and £7,000 for "travel" – must be Tory MP Jacqui Lait, whose Beckenham constituency home is less than 10 miles from the Palace of Westminster (her main residence being a £1.5m pile at Rye in Sussex). At least Lait turned up – but, along with Labour's Andrew Dismore (Hendon), she voted against reform. It may not always be clear where some MPs live, but at least we know where they stand.

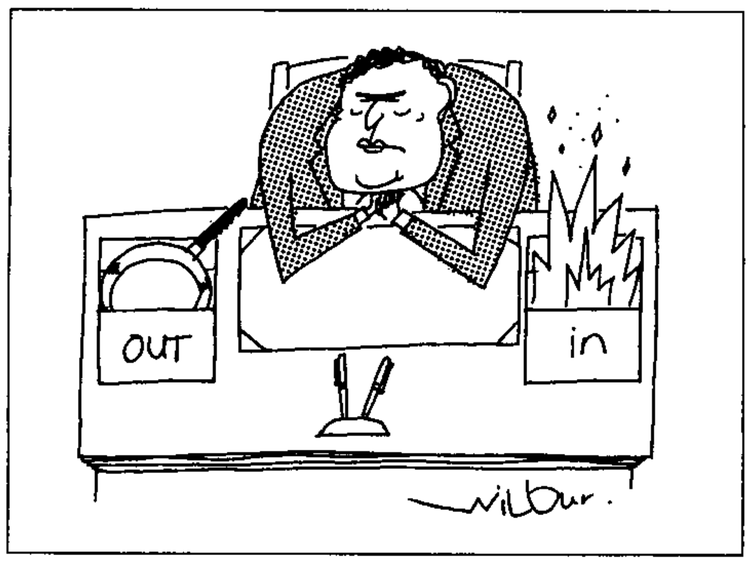
ALPHA VILE

ONE of the Lib Dems' most generous financial supporters put elderly dementia sufferers "at risk" in its "poor quality" homes, according to government inspections.

Alpha Healthcare, which runs 13 nursing homes for old people, including dementia sufferers, had rotten, "no-star" inspection reports last year at its Bromson Hill and Regents Court homes in the Midlands (although Regents Court's rating improved this January and Alpha says Bromson Hill's rating will rise next time round).

The homes charge up to £35,000 a year per resident – which might explain why Alpha has been able to afford to give the Lib Dems £435,000 since 2005.

"It's my moral compass – I think it may be faulty"



MAD, NAD & DANGEROUS

NEVER mind the matter of her own huge expenses – "Mad" Nadine Dorries, Tory MP for Mid-Bedfordshire, is more concerned with the *Telegraph*'s motives behind its scoop.

In her blog last Thursday, Nad mused that the expenses stories were in fact part of a plot by the Barclay Brothers, proprietors of the *Telegraph*, to destabilise parliament. "Rumour is that they are fiercely Eurosceptic and do not feel that either of the main parties are Eurosceptic enough," she wrote. "They have set upon a deliberate course to destabilise Parliament, with the hope that the winners will be UKIP and BNP."

Perhaps these latest mad mutterings, and the *Telegraph*'s subsequent claim on its website that David Cameron had "slapped her down" for her general remarks on the current scandal, will at least help to distract Nad's constituents from their confusion over her exes. Bedfordshire has four MPs (not counting Luton's two) and Mad Nad's £152,000 is the highest expenses tally claimed by any of them. She has two homes, both of which she says she rents – one in Woburn in her constituency and the other in the Cotswolds.

The confusion arises over which she counts as her main home. In her blog – never coherent at the best of times – she nominated the Cotswolds, where her three children and dog were said to live, looked after by her ex-husband, and where, she says, she returns at weekends: "I spend more nights away from my constituency home than I spend in it and I use it for the purpose of my work… It may only be a second home, however, it is a home." This appears to mean that she regards Woburn as a second home.

But elsewhere in her blog she has said that she and her family were to settle in Woburn: "The decision was very much taken out of my hands by the kids. They fell in love with the town and it didn't matter where else we went, they kept coming back to Woburn… It also makes sense logistically. My constituency office is in Shefford [a few miles from Woburn] and I am in the House of Commons four nights a week so it is manageable."

Nad's house in Woburn is owned by the Duke of Bedford. A spokesman for Woburn Settled Estates, the Duke's family trust, said Ms Dorries was paying a commercial rent, but would not specify what it was.

The Duke has been a supporter of Mad Nad since her selection as candidate at the last general election. In the past he has coughed up £2,000 for Tory candidates, but in her case he upped it to £10,000.

In her election literature, "Mad" announced herself dedicated to the preservation of the Green Belt. Yet in 2006, when Center Parcs wanted to cover 350 acres of it in concrete, she flew to the company's support (*Eye* 1171).

It was, of course, the purest coincidence that the land in question was owned by her good friend, er, the Duke of Bedford.

FIDDLE STICKS

AFTER promising for years that Gordon Brown's greatest off balance sheet fiddle – the private finance initiative – would come back on to the government's books, the Treasury has decided it won't after all.

Although Brown has spent the last 18 months blaming the world's financial woes on the banks' financial chicanery ("too much off balance sheet activity", he said), the Treasury this month slipped out a note instructing government departments to keep two sets of books - just the kind of "transparency" and straightforwardness the public finances need.

For internal purposes most PFI deals will be on balance sheet, while for calculating levels of government debt they will be *off*. The excuse is that the debt figures have to follow European rules; but the real attraction is that pet projects such as a £13bn jet refuelling deal for the Ministry of Defence can go ahead without counting as capital investment. In the budget Alistair Darling announced that spending on capital investment would fall £20bn a year by 2013 as part of his recovery plan. The fact that PFI deals invisibly commit future taxpayers to even higher costs can be conveniently ignored for now.

Not so long ago the Tories would have jumped on this fiddle from an "Enron chancellor" but, perhaps realising they might soon find the ruse handy themselves, they remain strangely muted. Meanwhile the accounting U-turn has been warmly welcomed by PFI consultants. Leading light is PricewaterhouseCoopers partner Charles Lloyd, now seconded as head of the PFI unit at the same Treasury that decided it will be off balance sheet business as usual. Just fancy that!

ADULT FRICTION

"WE recognise the importance of learning for pleasure and the enormous contribution it makes to the well-being of individuals, neighbourhoods and wider society," said skills secretary John Denham loftily when launching the "Learning Revolution" white paper. Is this the same John Denham who has presided over the halving of adult learning in the past two years?

Figures released in December initially showed a 38 percent drop in the number of adult learners taking courses at GCSE level or below. But the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills later had to revise that figure and admit to a 48 percent drop: 1.4m publicly-funded course places have been lost since 2005.

According to the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, courses that adults were actually interested in attending, such as languages, arts and cookery, were slashed and the funds shifted to the government's Train to Gain programme. But Train to Gain failed to spend the money (it was £200m underspent last year) after failing to increase the demand for training from employers (see *Eye* 1225), so it was used to fill a hole in the universities budget instead.

At a meeting with lifelong learning campaigners in March, Denham said the government didn't have money for "subsidising people who want to learn Spanish for holidays". So it's no surprise the centrepiece of this new "recognition" of adult learning for pleasure is a cheapo plan to identify more than 7,000 rooms in libraries, cafes, pubs and shops that will "throw open their doors to self-organised informal learning" such as book groups and craft clubs.

As most such rooms are already open to the public and there's no provision to fund teaching, this supposed "21st century vision to help adults learn for pleasure" is essentially telling adults to do it themselves.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"I know that my constituents want to be reassured that public money is being used correctly. Therefore I have decided to hold a Public Question Time in Bury at which anyone can come along and question me both about my own use of public funds and about the workings of the system as a whole."
– David Chaytor MP, *31 March 2009*

"In respect of mortgage interest payments, there has been an unforgivable error in my accounting procedures."
– David Chaytor MP, *16 May 2009*

HACKWATCH

Polly Toynbee on Gordon's chances

"THERE is a new light-headedness in the Labour party," Polly Toynbee exulted in the *Guardian* two years ago, as Tony Blair packed his bags. "With the coming of Gordon Brown there is scope for hope." Since then her hopes have been dashed again and again; but can Polly bring herself to admit that it's all over for Labour? Surely there's still a chance, however slight...

13 June 2008: "It's not just Gordon Brown who looks like a dead man walking," sighs Polly. "Labour now looks like a party of zombies." Don't despair, however. "What couldn't you do with two years and a majority of 66? With the recklessness of those about to die, they could do everything they never dared." She urges the zombies to "seize their last chance".

27 June: Labour has obeyed. Polly marvels at "this week's cornucopia of good policies".

19 July: And still they keep coming – "an avalanche of good policies" this week. "Who knows," she muses, "Labour might even start to win again."

2 August: Polly's column is an ode to joy: "Suddenly everything changed. The burst of optimism was so startling it dazzled those too long trapped in a dungeon." In short, David Miliband has written an article for the *Grauniad* saying Labour needs to do a bit better. He is "the man to free the party from the bondage of failed leadership", Polly raves. "September will prove the mettle of the cabinet, the pluck or cowardice of individual ministers to seize one last chance..."

6 September: Back in June 2007, Polly wrote that Brown's new cabinet was "as decent and clever a team of ministers as ever graced the cabinet table". Now she trashes them as "a cabinet of minnows" who are too spineless to topple Gordon. "Unseating a prime minister is very high risk," she concedes, "but a dying party should be ready to take dangerous medicine." It is, after all, "the last chance left".

13 September: Memo to Labour MPs: cheer up! "Cameron's victory is not certain – yet," Polly reckons. But Labour can't lay a blow on him "until it shakes off the dust of the last terrible year and gives itself one last chance".

11 October: "Brown is proving a good man in a crash," Polly rejoices. He is "out ahead of the world in bank financing and much praised". Can he now win round the British electorate? "He has the chance..."

14 October: Polly is hopelessly in love again. "The all-conquering prime minister... saviour of the world... This is about as good as it gets for a prime minister." Now, at last, "Brown has the chance to redeem himself..."

15 November: That first careless rapture is wearing off. Polly warns him that drastic economic action is required, pronto. "There is still time for redemption – nine days. The pre-budget report on 24 November is the last chance..."

16 December: The last chance has been seized. "The worse things get, the stronger the trust in the government," she claims. "There is even talk of a spring election."

21 February 2009: The economic news goes from bad to worse, despite what Polly foretold in January 2008. ("A minor slowdown with neither inflation nor unemployment will see Brown's old 'no return to boom and bust' triumph this time next year.") Would changing the leader help? Certainly not. "The time has passed for the guillotine: Labour imploding in the middle of the world's worst crash would risk electoral disaster" – whereas Labour "could, just, still win" under Brown. "Clarity and honesty are the only hope. April's budget is Labour's last chance."

10 March: For anyone who wasn't paying attention, Polly gives an encore: "Next month's budget will be Labour's last chance..."

14 March: And once more: "Here is the last chance for Labour..."

21 April: An eve-of-budget address to the ministerial troops. "Give voters one rock-solid reminder of what Labour is for," Polly commands. "This is the last chance."

23 April: Alas! "What a tragic failure..." So that's that, presumably. No more chances.

2 May: "Rumblings about removing Brown are wishful thinking," Polly writes. "The dream scenario is that grey suits tell him to go, he obliges, and that nice Alan Johnson soothes the party through to at least a respectable defeat. Dream on." They're all doomed, "in free fall without a parachute".

5 May: Wait a minute. "As fresh humiliation closes in," Polly reveals, "Brown can forge a triumph." All he has to do is abandon his part-privatisation of Royal Mail, and instead make post offices "the friendly face of the state" by having cafes in them. "This," she says, "is the last chance..."

16 May: The PM had his chance, and he muffed it. He has ignored her advice; he must pay the price. Luckily, there is one person around whom the party could speedily unite – not her former beau David Miliband but the new dreamboat Alan Johnson. "If Brown is made to walk the plank in June, the arrival of a fresh face, clean hands and a new narrative would let Johnson claim some time." How can Polly convince Labour MPs of the urgency of the situation? Luckily she has just the phrase. "This," she declares, "is Labour's last chance."

Or perhaps not. In Polly's Last Chance Saloon, there's always time for one more drink.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

MEPs are still refusing to publish full details of their lavish expenses, conveniently forgetting that part of their role is to scrutinise the way the EU spends taxpayers' money.

Andrew Neill made five attempts in BBC2's *Daily Politics* on 14 May to obtain a pledge from the UK's Europe minister Caroline Flint that Labour MEPs "will publish their expenses now and in full before the June elections". But the minister failed to give any such reassurance, preferring to talk about "how European elections affect people's lives".

Even a formal request by the European ombudsman to the European parliament's bureau that all expenses should be published in detail was refused on the grounds that it infringed MEPs' "right to privacy". The bureau, led by rabid Europhile president Hans-Gert Pöttering with his 14 vice-presidents, is supposed to be responsible for budget administration and staff. But a secret internal audit last year, leaked by British Lib Dem MEP Chris Davies, showed that some MEPs claimed for non-existent staff to pocket their £175,800 office allowance, while others failed to pay social security benefits. One Christmas bonus exceeded €1m.

It's election year

Under a new statute, MEPs will get a salary of around €92,000, together with a subsistence allowance of €298 a day and, from July, an additional travel allowance of €260 a week – as well as an office allowance and staff pension.

Whistleblower Davies has condemned the "extravagant" pay-outs and declared: "MEPs' expenses should be set by an independent body and every MEP should be required to publish details of all the money they receive." But MEPs have so far ignored taxpayers, choosing to approve the annual commission budget, which is more like a sieve than a safe and is in line with their current, approved system of making claims without any obligation to provide receipts.

FLAVIEN DELTORT, who exposed MEPs' pisspoor attendance and voting records at the European parliament on the parlorama.eu website, has been forced to take his site offline after receiving legal threats (see *Eye* 1235).

MEPs complained the site did not reflect the "invisible" work they did as parliamentarians, and that it was a quantitative rather than qualitative analysis. What really worries them of course is that at some stage information on attendance and voting patterns is going to be matched with data showing who has signed in to receive his or her generous daily allowance. This could be embarrassing, to say the least.

Unhappily for MEPs parlorama.eu has now been supplanted by another website, votewatch.eu. This will be much harder to close down because it is backed by the European Policy Centre, an ultra-responsible Brussels think-tank.

The new site is more comprehensive than parlorama.eu and a repository of some fascinating facts and figures. It shows, for example, that over the last five-year parliament, maverick member Robert Kilroy-Silk has earned his £300,000 (plus generous allowances to pay for an assistant, in this case one Jan Kilroy-Silk), not by turning up but by tabling an extraordinary 1,921 written questions – nearly 1,000 more than any other MEP. A typical example: "What is wrong with the word 'Jihad'? What is wrong with the word 'Islamic'?" to which he received the answer: "The Commission sees no point in the questions put by the Honourable Member and is therefore unable to reply to them."

SCOTS FREED

THE cash-strapped National Trust for Scotland (NTS) announced job cuts last week as it pressed on with plans to close and mothball several major properties, including national treasures such as Leith Hall and Barry Mill.

A handful of threatened properties, including Kellie Castle, were given a last-minute reprieve last week, thanks to a huge donation from America. But on 20 May the NTS announced 44 compulsory and 21 voluntary redundancies at other properties, while 46 temporary workers also lost their jobs. All of which is a bad way to herald Scotland's tourism-boosting Year of Homecoming.

The workers belong to the union Prospect, which has condemned trust bosses' mismanagement of finances and their "incredible lack of information and understanding about seasonal staff posts". They also lambasted NTS's involvement in the £21m Burns National Heritage Park in Alloway, noting that the expensive scheme – no bad idea in better times – had been pursued to the detriment of the rest of the trust.

It's also worth noting that some of NTS's bosses don't have great track records. NTS finance director Lesley Watt and Henk Berits, the director of commercial services and marketing, were the finance and marketing directors of Scotland's biggest ever dotcom flop, globalfarmers.com. The online farming supplies firm went into receivership in 2001 despite having won £3.6m investment from Bank of Scotland and Caledonian Heritable Investments.

"I don't think it's a good idea. People have worked their whole life to build up their business and then it all gets taxed away. I remember when Dennis Healey said he would squeeze the rich until their hips squeaked,

Finchley Times

MEDIA NEWS

BBC Trust chairman Sir Michael Lyons hit the airwaves to defend the TV licence fee arrangement which allows for year-on-year increases, against Tory plans to freeze it.

His argument was that any plan to restrict funding amounted to "a recipe for curbing the BBC's editorial independence". It's an odd defence at a time when the BBC is already making its own financial cuts to news services, shedding jobs in the business unit, cutting *Newsnight*'s budget by 15 percent and closing posts in several foreign bureaux.

These losses mean the BBC will have to rely more heavily on competing news agencies, such as Agence France Presse, the Press Association and Reuters to provide "breaking news" stories for its outlets – a surrender of editorial independence that doesn't seem to trouble Sir Michael or the Trust one little bit.

LAST week the BBC announced that Jonathan Ross would no longer make live appearances on any of its channels, as his three-hour Radio 2 show would now be recorded in advance (as his BBC1 chat show and *Film 2009* already are).

This is a curious turnaround from the situation two years ago following the fake phone-ins scandal, when it was discovered that apparently live shows across several networks had been soliciting text messages and competition entries even though the programmes had been in the can for days by the time of broadcast. Following a series of fines by Ofcom, networks were advised to avoid pre-records wherever possible.

"Radio 2 has reviewed the way that we make all of our programmes since the end of last year," a BBC spokeswoman told the *Guardian* last week. "Pre-recording Jonathan's show enables us to ensure the programme is watertight in line with compliance."

"The end of last year" is, of course, BBC-speak for the occasion when Ross and his friend Russell Brand made those phone calls to Andrew Sachs. Which, you will recall, they did on a Radio 2 show. Which was pre-recorded.

MORE strides forward in the BBC's grand scheme to move its staff "Out of London".

Following confirmation in March that production of *Casualty* would move all the way from Bristol to Cardiff (*Eye* 1233), this month saw the announcement of a number of changes in newsgathering to take advantage of the corporation's spanking new "MediaCity" development in Salford.

Among the posts that will be relocated is that of a senior broadcast camera journalist, who will make the move to Salford – all the way from Leeds. A social affairs correspondent post which has traditionally been based in Leeds, meanwhile, will go altogether.

"You promised your mother and me that you'd stopped self-harming"

DUMB BRITAIN

Are You Smarter Than A Ten-Year-Old?, Sky One

Presenter: Who wrote the story of Peter Pan? A.A. Milne, J.M. Barrie or T.S. Eliot?

Contestant *(a teacher)*: Okay. I've read the story. I've saw the films. I've not saw the panto. I'm pretty sure it's T.S. Eliot.

Presenter: Which dinosaur is named after the ancient Greek for "three-horned face"?

Same contestant: Right. You've got your Tyrannosaurus Rex. Or it could be that Pterodactyl type thing or something.

Quiz Call, five

Chris *(late night, chirpy)*: We're looking for things that are red. We've already got pillar box and fire engine. Michelle, what's your answer?

Michelle: A book.

MPs ON TV

QUIZZED on BBC Radio Five Live about his claim of £2,499 for a TV set, refused on the grounds that parliament had been dissolved for the 2005 election when it was submitted, Lib Dem MP Lembit Opik insisted he had done nothing wrong.

"I went over and said, 'This is pretty pricey, what do you think?' They said, 'Put it in and we'll have a look.' They said it was too expensive, they disallowed it. That's not the technical reason it was disallowed. I said fair enough, and in the end I bought a TV for £750, so that was the system working."

Opik did not specify why he did not feel the need to pay for the monster TV out of his extra-parliamentary earnings from the year in question, which included "Fees from *Hello! Magazine* for interview: up to £5,000", "Fees from BBC for appearances on *Keith Barrett Show* and *Mastermind*" and a further "Fee from *Hello! Magazine*" for an unspecified amount. Instead, he decided to devote much of his appearance to attacking the *Telegraph* for revealing the information: "I never expected this lack of integrity from a paper I've always respected. I'm absolutely appalled."

Perhaps this is a topic he will explore further in his regular "Journalism for the *Daily Sport*" for which he declares in income of "up to £5,000" a year.

"FEWER and fewer people will be watching BBC television – so why should they have to pay more for it?" asked MP Gerald Kaufman, months before submitting an expenses claim for an £8,865 TV set.

As the *Daily Telegraph* revealed last week, Kaufman was refused all but £750 of the claim, leaving him to make up the £8,115 difference from his own pocket. Thankfully the "up to £5,000" he made in extra-parliamentary earnings in the year in question, 2006, must have helped. The source? "Fees from the Telegraph Group."

The costs of swimming pool maintenance are among expenses claims by eight Tory MPs according to the Daily Telegraph.

- **Speaker angry over leak**

BBC News website

MODESTY BLAZE

"Ravi Bopara joins Herbert Sutcliffe, Denis Compton, myself and Graham Gooch as the only Englishmen to make three successive Test hundreds. If he becomes half as good as the four before him he'll make a great cricketer." – *Geoffrey Boycott.*

AD NAUSEAM

THE ASA rapped the mountain clothing retailer skiwear4less.com last week for an email promotion that hit inboxes on the day of the death of the actress Natasha Richardson in March.

"Skiers and boarders!" it began. "We regret to inform you that Natasha Richardson has died after suffering a head injury."

Skiwear4less was quick to offer condolences, and even quicker to spot the sales opportunity: "She was not wearing a helmet at the time. To encourage the wearing of ski helmets, we have reduced the prices of both kids' and adults' ski helmets and are offering FREE POSTAGE on all ski helmets."

In a suitably dumb coda, the Advertising Standards Authority merely ordered that the ad not be repeated. So if Natasha Richardson happens to die of a skiing-related injury again, any tastelessness will be avoided.

DID Marks & Spencer's ad department consult the M&S boardroom before scheduling the company's bumper new 125th anniversary ad epic?

We ask because it seemed odd that M&S's "Quality Worth Every Penny" campaign, a lavish panegyric featuring Twiggy going back in time to the company's 19th century roots as a penny bazaar, launched on the evening of 18 May. The very next morning M&S announced it was cutting its dividend by a third after sales fell nearly £400m year on year.

The day after that, on the back of a further press campaign, M&S soldiered on regardless with the whole penny thing, offering 300 product lines for just one penny. Joined up corporate governance, anyone?

"WE KNOW salt is a killer," says Marco Pierre White, fronting a campaign launched by the World Hypertension League to encourage people to eat less salt.

"People suffer strokes and heart attacks as a result of too much salt. I don't think the government has made people aware. It has a responsibility to inform the public. Salty foods like crisps should carry a warning."

Or, indeed, foods like Knorr stock cubes. A Knorr beef cube contains 4.5g salt – which means that 45 per cent of its weight is salt. Each 100ml of made-up Knorr stock contains 0.9g salt, which is 15 percent of an adult's maximum recommended daily intake but 30 percent of the daily limit for a four- to six-year-old child and a whopping 45 percent for a two- to three-year-old one. As White says, we must stop our children wolfing the stuff down so greedily and recklessly. "We can all take simple steps to reduce the level of salt in our diets such as avoiding processed, pre-packaged foods and using citrus fruit, herbs and spices instead of salt to enhance flavour."

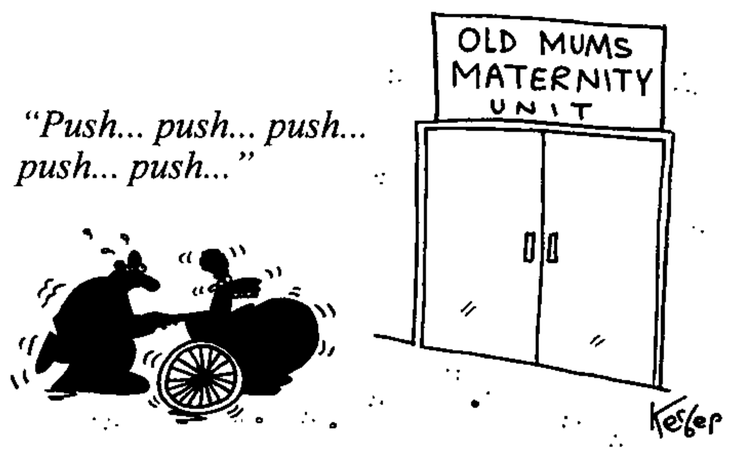
No doubt he will pass the message to Knorr's "brand ambassador", who stars in the adverts for their stock cubes… a chef called Marco Pierre White.

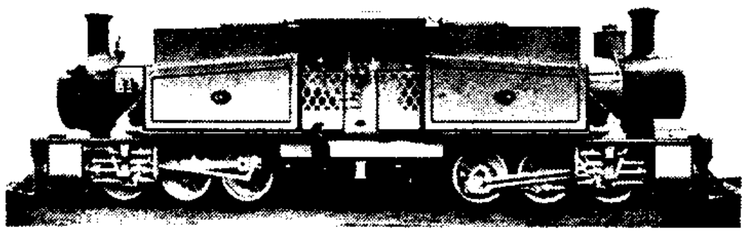
Quote of the Week

"The great thing about it is when you start seeing it in places like China and Afghanistan. It's democracy. We've kinda given democracy back to the world."

– **Simon Cowell** on the Oprah Winfrey Show

"Push... push... push... push... push..."





SIGNAL FAILURES

Bonus balls

THE generosity of Network Rail chief Iain Coucher in foregoing his annual bonus illustrates a culture change in Britain's rail network.

Coucher doesn't want criticism of his bonus to detract from Network Rail's achievements; but he's clinging on to his lolly (about £200,000) under another bonus scheme which, in NR's words, is "designed to replicate share options within a plc". Reserving his right to next year's full bonus, he said: "I still believe passionately in the principle of paying people for success. The bonus system focuses on the issues that are important, and it drives our performance."

For generations managers believed passionately in railways; pride in the job drove performance (which equalled or bettered today's). Then privatisation made money the industry's sole motivation. Old-school executives were replaced by accountants and targets narrowly defining success not in relation to passengers but by minutes of train delays or pounds earned or saved. The cash infatuation failed to improve on British Rail's financial discipline; costs went through the roof, forcing fares and subsidy to rocket.

Railtrack collapsed because of its obsession with dividends, share price and being a blue-chip company, not a "boring old utility". Its successor, not-for-profit Network Rail, was designed to avoid such pitfalls. Train operators, who are focused on their next annual results, are shedding hundreds of staff, but NR's funding for the next five years was fixed before the recession. That's an enviable position for any company director, but Coucher reckons NR directors wouldn't bother doing their jobs properly without plc-style bonuses dangled before their noses.

RAIL minister Andrew Adonis "officially opened the upgraded £8.9bn west-coast mainline" on 13 May, delighted it's been "completely overhauled".

Meanwhile the rail industry advised that on 24 May the west-coast mainline would shut for engineering at Coventry-Rugby, Milton Keynes-Northampton, Stoke-Macclesfield, Crewe-Liverpool, Crewe-Warrington and Nuneaton-Tamworth.

SHOULD David Cameron modify his slogan to "Vote blue, sod green" as council elections loom?

Shadow women's minister Theresa May told Nottingham voters that long-planned extensions to the city's light-rail system should be ditched in favour of bus improvements. Carbon emissions per passenger mile are much lower from trams than buses, and trams are more likely than buses to attract motorists to public transport – reducing carbon emissions and local air pollution from cars.

May knows all about this: as shadow transport secretary she toured Newcastle's light-rail Metro in 2004 including a visit to the Metro's Gateshead interchange. Afterwards she gushed: "Gateshead demonstrates the kind of quality, design and facilities that public transport needs to have to persuade people from their cars. I was very impressed with the investment."

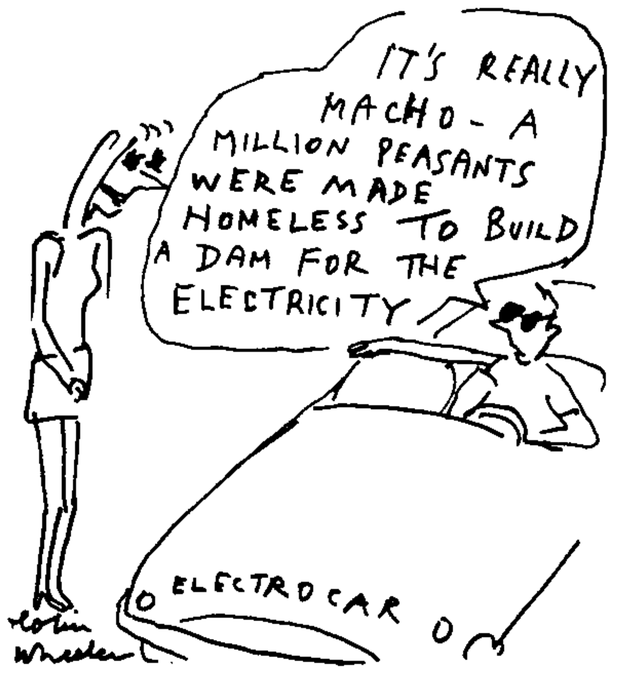
But providing similar public transport in Nottingham would "cost an awful lot of money, nearly £30m… which would have to be paid for across the whole of the county", she ranted this month, showing how tempting it can be to pander to local opponents of the scheme when there's an election in the air.

VIRGIN is inviting unflattering comparisons by promoting its "iconic" Pendolinos as connecting services for steam trains on the Settle-Carlisle railway this summer.

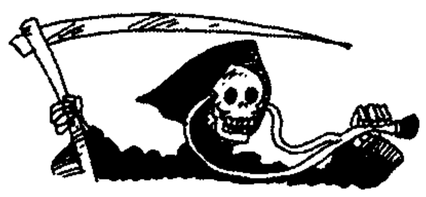
The vintage trains are "aimed primarily at the family market", says Virgin, and passengers will be "seated in carriages from the 1950s and 60s with a central table". What a great idea! Each family gets a window and seats around a table, perfect for talking, picnics, board games and colouring books. Back in the 21st century, families will find just 28 central tables in five standard-class Pendolino carriages. Most of the 294 seats face the high backs of the seats in front, and Virgin's seating plan shows one in three seats has "limited/no view". Just the thing to induce cabin fever in kids.

PS: Survey results this month from Passenger Focus watchdog revealed Virgin Pendolinos are Britain's most unpopular intercity trains. Pendolinos came bottom in 10 out of 15 categories of comfort.

'Dr B Ching'



MEDICINE BALLS



Splitting the consultant

WHAT was the real aim of the government's disastrous attempt to "modernise medical careers" (*Eyes passim*)?

Campaign group RemedyUK has been passed restricted emails from the Department of Health, obtained under the freedom of information act. These suggest that, far from introducing a system that was "good for doctors, patients and the NHS", Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) was designed to save money by creating a new sub-consultant grade for hospital doctors.

On 13 March 2006 an email from the deputy branch head of NHS Pay and Pensions outlined two possible approaches: "One is to run an identical structure alongside the current consultant pay scale but with a lower top salary, the second is to divide the consultant pay scale with a 'bar' beyond which only some consultants would progress. We recommend that the second approach is safer. It would be hard to justify the 'streaming' of doctors leaving training into two parallel pay scales, with some joining a grade with access to high pay, and others not. By contrast, placing a promotion bar in the existing scale would be much easier to defend and operate."

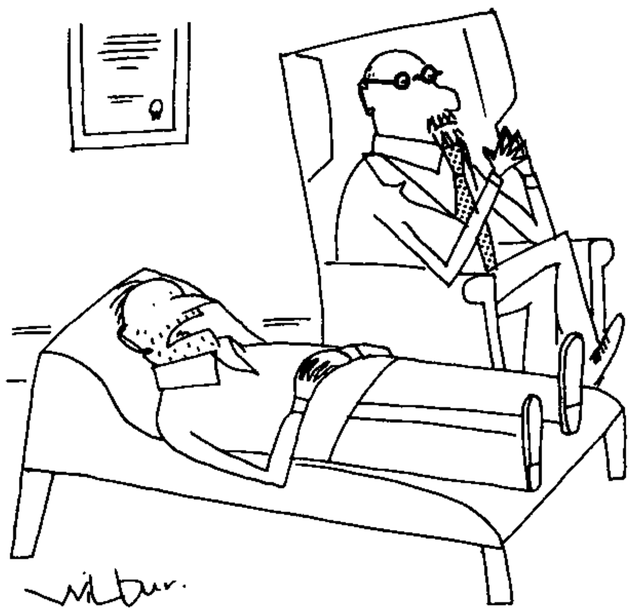
None of this is surprising. The new consultant contract signed-off by the then health secretary John Reid made NHS specialists far more expensive to employ and pension, particularly when it became apparent how many hours they had previously worked and not claimed for. MMC was used as a way to rein in costs by restricting the number of senior consultants on higher pay scales. In doing so, the promise of a consultant-led NHS evaporated and the career options of the expanding number of junior doctors have been severely curtailed.

The DoH has consistently denied that MMC was linked to cost cutting and strongly resisted disclosing these documents on the grounds that it could "impinge on the morale of health professionals thus provoking unnecessary concern and discontent... and inhibit discussions of future options as the submissions talk specifically about the affordability of the consultant workforce."

The information commissioner disagreed: "There is a significant public interest in ensuring that the public are well informed about options being considered by the government so that they can fully understand the government's reasoning behind the need to review the consultant role. The withheld information would allow the public to engage in a constructive debate as to whether the reasons for the review as well as the options being considered have been properly weighed alongside the potential impact on health care services."

The impact on health care services is far from "potential". Middle-grade doctors have abandoned dead-end NHS hospital careers and, combined with immigration restrictions and the restricted hours of the European working time directive (see last *Eye*), there are dangerous holes in shift rotas up and down the country. Still, when things go tits up, you can always demand to see the sub-consultant.

M.D.



"I've started hearing voices in my head, but, y'know... it's a bit of company..."

NHS IT

NHS patients who don't want their medical records computerized under the NHS's £12.7bn national IT programme face a heavy penalty.

When an *Eye* reader asked the Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust to keep his records off the IT system, he was told by the trust's "director of strategy and performance" that "the trust is legally required to maintain local records of service users [translation: patient] and the care provided". True; but why can't those who wish, have paper records that can't be whizzed anywhere at the press of a button and lost? The strategy director explained: "These records are held in an electronic Care Record System called RiO, which is provided by [Department of Health agency] Connecting for Health, and which complies with national and NHS rules on data protection and data security. Connecting for Health is a government initiative whereby no hospital or health organisation will have paper records, only computerized."

The upshot? "If a service-user refuses to have the necessary information recorded in the electronic care record then, due to the above legal requirements and duty of care, the Trust would be unable to provide treatment". So there you have it: if you don't want your health records computerized and your trust has been through the NHS IT programme, forget about receiving treatment.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LAUGHING STOCK

MUCH hilarity over the BNP's patriotic "British Jobs for British Workers" election leaflet.

As well as a Polish WWII Spitfire, it featured stock photos of Italian pensioners, a former Scots Guardsman who denounced the racist party as "scumbags" as soon as he found out his picture had been used, and a trio of three "British" construction workers who turned out to be in Portland, Oregon.

Less amused is Robert Macey, election agent for Shropshire Conservatives, who mined the same online photo gallery for his handsome county council election leaflet which features one of the very same hard-hatted, yellow-jacketed Oregonians as on the BNP flyer. Fickle fellows, builders, eh?

BNP builder

Tory worker

SOMERSET SAPS

SOMERSET county council chief exec Alan Jones, blue-sky thinker and gobshite extraordinaire, tells the world that Southwest One, the council's half-baked £500m outsourcing joint venture with Avon & Somerset Police, Taunton Deane council and IBM, is "innovative beyond public imagination" (*Eye* 1235). Within County Hall in Taunton, however, he is rather more realistic. "I know we're not there yet... we are still encountering difficulties," he admits in an email to staff.

The cornerstone of Southwest One is an IT system called SAP, which is supposed to make ordering and payments by the three authorities more efficient. So efficient is SAP that many staff were paid double-time to work through the bank holiday weekend at the start of May to clear a backlog of unprocessed invoices. These, according to Jones's deputy, David Taylor, "were generated by problems when we first launched". He adds that "a big push" is needed to "really crack" the problems.

Inspector Knacker has also reported problems with SAP. According to a report to the police authority: "The work on integrating our transport management software package... with SAP was not complete at go-live on 1 April 2009. This has resulted in an additional manual process being required... The interface was [tested again]... but again data failed to flow between the two systems successfully..." Chief constable Colin Port, whose wife Susan Barnes was Southwest One's project director at County Hall, must be thrilled.

In the Commons last month Bridgwater's Tory MP Ian Liddell-Grainger said Southwest One was "making a complete hash of everything... its computer system does not work, it cannot place orders or pay bills and it is certainly not saving any money."

KITE MARK

DARTFORD football club's Princes Park stadium is, according to Dartford borough council's website, the result of a "love affair between the club, council and sports fans... the envy of every non-league club in the country". The prose may be purple, but it's a down-to-earth sort of place, not "about the preMadonna's [*sic*] of the premiership".

If Dartford council has problems with its English, its maths isn't looking too clever, either. The stadium was built by the council for £6.5m and opened in 2006. Before the first fans went through the turnstiles, the Tory council agreed to lease the stadium to the privately-owned Dartford FC for a peppercorn rent of £1 a year. In February this year the council handed control of the stadium to the club, while letting it keep the income generated from the bar, turnstiles, facilities hire, etc. In March the council agreed to pay the club an annual management fee, not unadjacent to £100,000, to run the stadium, while still allowing it to keep the profits it makes from the facilities built with council taxpayers' money.

At the end of April a grateful club announced it had a new board member -- council leader Jeremy Kite, who grandiosely calls his council sidekicks "junior ministers". He said: "I am really looking forward to taking up this unpaid role and making whatever small contribution I can." Too, too modest.

BETWEEN THE LINES

PLANS to build a tram network in Edinburgh have been labelled "Holyrood on Wheels", as delays, spiralling costs and a scaling back of what was first envisaged have derailed the project.

Overseeing the scheme is Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE), which receives 90 percent of its funding from Transport Scotland, a government agency, the remainder coming from Edinburgh city council. The cost of the three-line network linking most of Edinburgh was estimated at £473m when first mooted in 2003. This rocketed to £714m after it was realised no allowance had been made for inflation. The scheme was then delayed while Transport Scotland and Edinburgh council argued over who should find the extra money.

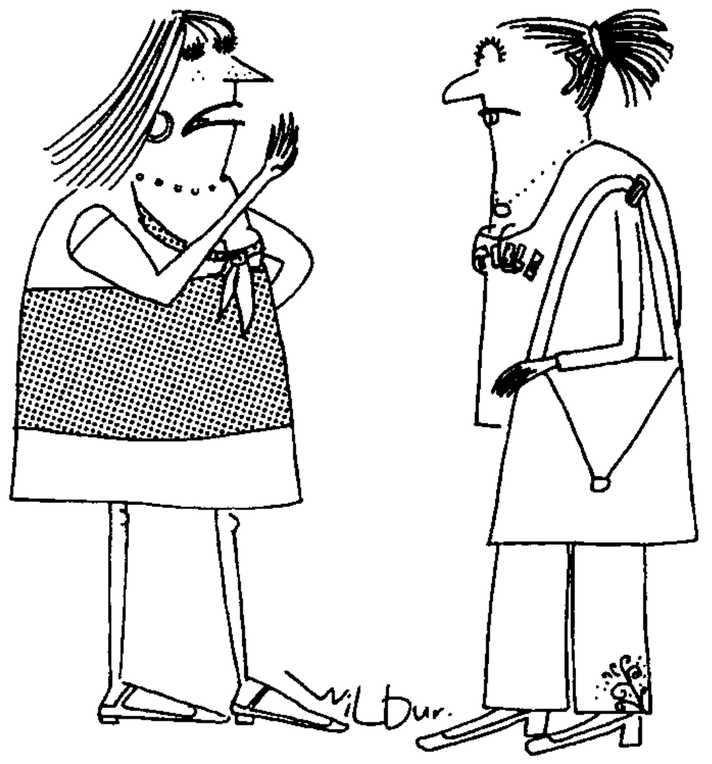
In January 2006, after a failed referendum and overspends, it was announced there would not be three lines after all, but just one, linking the airport and Leith. Thus the tram "network" would not serve 95 percent of the city's residents.

Two months later project chief Ian Kendall resigned after TIE admitted it had spent £60m on the scheme before final approval had been given. Filling Kendall's boots, as well as his own, was Willie Gallagher, who within a year of starting doubled his salary to £170,000.

Last November the SNP deputy council leader Steve Cardownie called for Gallagher's resignation after poor planning left the city gridlocked as utility pipes were re-laid to make way for the tramlines. The next month Gallagher resigned for "personal" reasons.

The cruel irony is that for many years Edinburgh has had a bus service which has regularly won awards as one of the UK's best. It is now losing customers and revenue thanks to the disruption caused by the tram works.

TIE has recently announced the single tramline won't run until 2011 and will include fewer stops, many half-a-mile apart. But a freedom of information request from SNP MSP Shirley-Anne Somerville has revealed that up to March 2008 TIE officials had nevertheless paid themselves bonuses totalling £970,000. Not bad given that the first tram line has yet to be laid.



"The expenses row has really put me off politics... so I'm going to vote for racism, bigotry and hatred instead"

PRICE OF PROTEST

PROTESTERS brave enough to campaign against power companies in south Wales are finding it a costly business.

They include pensioner Linda Ware who challenged a National Grid application to build a gas pipeline pressure reduction plant in her home village, Cilfrew (*Eye* 1212). Although Mrs Ware lives in a rented house and has no money to speak of, Neath Port Talbot council persists in chasing her for £24,000 incurred during a long court battle before her legal aid was in place.

Her lawyer, Richard Buxton has made "multiple efforts" to try to get the council to "go away", but NPT won't budge. At a court hearing in August Buxton will argue that the Aarhus convention – meant to ensure access to justice without penalty for genuine campaigners – applies. Buxton argues that the high court should not have ordered costs against Mrs Ware that would have made litigation "prohibitively expensive"- and not, in her case, more than "nominal".

The taxpayer will foot the bill if the council digs in its heels, which looks likely. Mrs Ware does now have legal aid, which means that even if the Aarhus point is rejected, Neath Port Talbot will not get its costs paid. Great value for the taxpayer, guys!

● POLITICS is in crisis. Revolution is in the air. There is talk of the need for a new party that reflects the mood of the country. Happily, it already exists. Step forward the Idle Toad party, which encapsulates the view of most voters about the current crop of MPs and councillors. Idle Toad, founded in 1997, already has one seat on Lancashire county council, where Cllr Tom Sharratt represents South Ribble Rural East. Alas, as so often in politics, after the brave new beginning follows the split. Sharratt faces a challenge on 4 June from a former Idle Toad colleague, Barrie Yates, who has broken away to join... the Conservatives. Some people have no imagination.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

THIS IS TRAGIC! ONE OF OUR FAVOURITE ISLINGTON DESIGNER HAUNTS SHUT UP AND GONE FOREVER!
TO THINK WE ONCE BLITHELY PURCHASED PAUL SMITH CRAVATS, COMME DES GARCONS CULOTTES HERE...
FOR SALE
CLOSED
NOT TO MENTION THAT BELTED AGNES B TRENCH COAT - I'M OVERCOME, QUIN!
YOU KNOW TIMES ARE BAD WHEN YOUR LOCAL CHARITY SHOP IS FORCED TO CLOSE DOWN!

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Crown Estate owns a sizeable historic chunk of central London, not least the glorious terraces around Regents Park and the buildings around Regent Street, but assures us that: "While preserving the heritage for which we care is a vital priority, the way in which we fulfil this important responsibility is driven by the best and most advanced business practices available to us".

Crown Estate profits go to the Treasury, so we all benefit from its activities; but the Estate's "core values", we are told, are commercialism, integrity and stewardship. The first sometimes predominates and the Crown Estate can be greedy and not always act in the public interest.

A few years ago it proposed to demolish the remarkable Regent Palace Hotel, opened in 1915, which was providing cheap accommodation for tourists in the heart of London (*Eye* 1196). It eventually won permission from Westminster city council to destroy most of its faience facades and redevelop the interior as flats, offices and shops. Now it has its commercial eye on several interesting 19th century buildings between Piccadilly and Jermyn Street close to Piccadilly Circus. All of them are in a conservation area and Westminster has identified three of them as "Buildings of Merit"; but the Crown Estate still wants to pull most of them down and replace them with a six-storey block.

The three facades on Piccadilly are all enjoyable once you look above the tawdry shop-fronts. No. 212 was designed for the National Provincial Bank in 1872 by its distinguished architect John Gibson, who was awarded the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture in 1890. This is to go, while its neighbour to the west, nos. 210-211, is to be rebuilt so its floors line up with those in the new building.

The design for the replacement, "St James's Gateway", by Eric Parry Architects is not bad, as these things go, but that is not the point. The point is that the buildings the Crown Estate wants to destroy are richly textured, varied, congenial in scale and make a happy contrast to the grandeur of the Edwardian block opposite. They are just the sort of small-scale street facades that give interest and variety to cities – precisely why Westminster included them in its St James's Conservation Area.

The Crown Estate argues that the threatened buildings are run down – but whose fault is that? They can perfectly well be restored and improved with better shop fronts. In straitened times, and given the importance of sustainability and the concept of "embodied energy" in structures, to destroy rather than repair these cheerful buildings is not good stewardship.

ANOTHER organisation that has become greedy is Greenwich Hospital, the charity that used to run Sir Christopher Wren's great Royal Naval Hospital (now the "University" of Greenwich).

The hospital has owned Greenwich Market since 1700 and wants to make more money out of it. A 2006 plan to close the market and redevelop the site with flats and shops was defeated. Now it wants to "revitalise" the market and cram a four-storey boutique hotel into the island site between the Naval Hospital and Hawksmoor's parish church.

Greenwich is remarkable for having retained its authentic, slightly raffish character despite commercial pressure. The market itself is enclosed within handsome stuccoed buildings of the 1830s. The great Ian Nairn admired the place in Nairn's London: "...smooth frontages, as good as Nash and better built. Inside a market, reached by three alleys and an archway, all leading as well to a good pub, the Coach and Horses. Not colours on a map, not interesting items in the townscape, but a living unit, the heart of Greenwich". The idea that this needs "regeneration" is preposterous as the market is thriving. But it is not smart enough for the council nor profitable enough for the Hospital. So Hopkins Architects have drawn up a plan to rebuild it.

The plain 1950s buildings, with shops, that line the market space will be rebuilt – higher – to accommodate restaurants and bars; the existing utilitarian overall roof is to be replaced by a pretentious canopied structure supported on a forest of columns; the cobbles are to be replaced by granite sets. And the Victorian storage spaces next to the Durnford Street approach will give way to the hotel – scarcely a "boutique" as it will have 100 rooms - squeezed into a semi-circular site. Yes, the market will survive, but it will be more like a new shopping centre and it is unlikely the present businesses will be able to afford to stay. Greenwich council hopes to give planning permission in July so the hotel can open in time for the 2012 Olympics, when Greenwich Park is to be commandeered and despoiled for equestrian events.

Greenwich doesn't need or want this gratuitous and greedy redevelopment. So why can't the place just be left alone?

THE expenses scandal at least shows that when it comes to architecture, our scrounging MPs are traditionalists at heart.

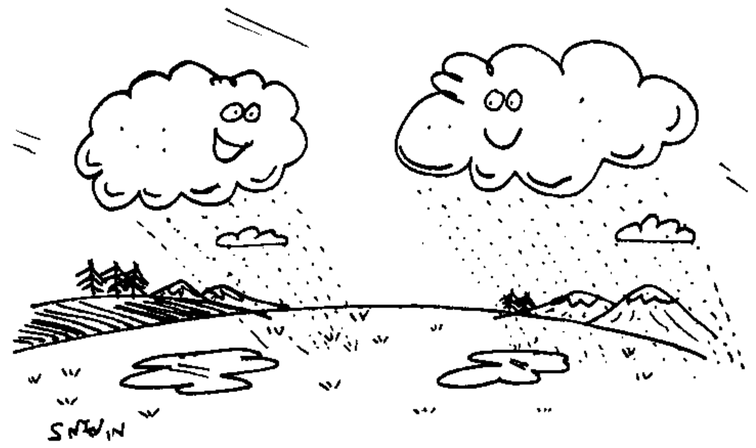
John Prescott, Old Labour bruiser, claimed for half-timbering on his gable, thus revealing bourgeois aspirations for "Stockbroker's Tudor"; while David Davis wants to be seen as a grandee by adding a portico to his house. At least no MP so far has claimed for rebuilding their home to a modernist design by Milords Rogers or Foster.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Apparently it was found on a rubbish tip.
WINSLOW HOMER- CHILDREN UNDER A PALM TREE.
DISCARDED WATERCOLOUR IDENTIFIED ON ANTIQUES ROADSHOW ESTIMATED AT £100,000
I'm not surprised!



"So which festival are you going to this summer?"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SIMON RATTLE likes to come across as music's Mr Nice Guy: open, decent, reasonable. And perhaps he is. But he also knows how to play the market and get what he wants; and right now he's playing an interesting game with his employer, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

For the past few years his relationship with the Philharmonic has been, in his words, "turbulent". British and German newspapers have periodically predicted imminent divorce; but Rattle and the Phil have always rushed into rebuttal mode, insisting everything was fine. Thus last week's news from the orchestra that Rattle's contract was to be extended until 2018 was taken largely at face value.

In fact it wasn't news at all: the orchestra voted him that 2018 contract extension last July. The only news was that Rattle hadn't signed on the dotted line. And even now, after the "announcement" has been made all over again, he *still* hasn't signed. Nor is he going to until September when the Berlin legislature is due to pass various guarantees he's asking for on things like future funding.

Thus, despite the repeated pantomime of everybody being best friends and confirming mutual commitments, Rattle is actually playing hard to keep. A cunning ploy. But how does he get away it? Perhaps because, despite whatever tensions exist, the band knows that a) he's good box-office; and, b) in the present climate they won't find anyone better. The Berlin Phil may or may not be the world's greatest orchestra, but there's a conspicuous shortage of world's greatest conductors to appoint. Promising youngsters, yes; eminent oldsters, yes; but very few in mid-life prime with real world class.

SIR SIMON can also be thankful he isn't represented by the international agency IMG Artists.

Many of his colleagues – Thomas Ades, Julian Lloyd Webber, Steven Isserlis, Antonio Pappano to select a few – *are* with the agency and are wondering what will happen in the fallout from the recent disaster when IMG Artists boss Barrett Wissman pleaded guilty to a massive US securities fraud.

The official company line is business as usual, stressing that the fraud arose from Wissman's broad, American-based business interests and had nothing to do with IMG. But he's the company chairman and owns 95 percent of the stock; the fraud was committed after his relationship with IMG began; and though he's agreed to pay an initial penalty of $12m, he still awaits full sentence and could go to jail.

Worse still, the chairman's fraud is bringing a raft of grievances against IMG Artists into the open, with calls for investigation into the way the company has, on Wissman's watch, been forcing up artists' fees to the detriment of non-profit and publicly-funded music organisations.

For some big names the company is believed to demand and get as much as $100,000 a night. And while there's no suggestion of any wrongdoing by the artists, questions are being asked about how the company secures that kind of money when orchestras face liquidation, opera houses are reducing their seasons and rank-and-file musicians are taking pay-cuts.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Question of privacy

Sir,

I was struck by the irony of Richard Granger [former head of the NHS National Programme for IT] seeking the protection of privacy laws in the solicitor's letter which your editor presented to the Commons select committee on privacy and libel recently.

Granger dubbed doctors and patients who did not want their medical data on his NHS database "privacy fascists"! (See www.e-health-insider.com.)

DR PAUL THORNTON,

Via email.

Choice words

Sir,

*Re Medicine Balls, Eye 1256. Sorry, but John Black does **not** have a point about patient choice. Giving us choice but denying us the information we'd need in order to use that choice is no more than a deliberate attempt to undermine the principle of choice.*

*I'm sick of hearing fatuous arguments like this. I have heard a twerp from Stafford hospital saying recently that we locals must still trust the hospital as some of us are still going there. What else are we expected to do? Cancel appointments with consultants we've been waiting months for and start all over again at another hospital with a consultant taken out of a hat because our GP only knows the local consultants? Cancel surgery we've been waiting months for and start again elsewhere from the beginning? In any case, **some** wards are very good there. But which ones, and how do we find out, except by personal experience of friends and family? There isn't always someone you know who has the same illness you do...*

We peasants will only be able to "choose" when we are also given true and full information about which hospitals are crap, which wards are filthy, which places are staffed with bone idle sluts of nurses who couldn't give a fuck, and which surgeons couldn't find their arse with both hands. And who/what is blocking us finding out? At present, even the NHS itself doesn't know, and it is happy to believe any old crap hospitals choose to tell it, even when patients have been (literally) going blue in the face complaining.

It's okay for doctors – they can ask around their colleagues and they'll tell them the truth on the quiet about the consultants/hospitals/GPs they know, but what about us?

Yours,
ALISON WILSON.

Via email.

Hardcore Bourn

Sir,

18 months or so ago the Eye's magnificent persistence exposed the grossly extravagant junketing of Sir John Bourn, the then head of the National Audit Office and the person responsible for auditing MPs' expense claims. Quite bafflingly, however, no disciplinary action followed because MPs said they couldn't see that Sir John had done any wrong.

Has any more information come to hand that might shed further light on this?

Yours faithfully,
MIKE NICHOLLS,

Hounslow, Middlesex.

See you next Tuesday

Sir,

Given the news about Scunthorpe's MP, Elliot Morley, perhaps you could resurrect the joke about "who put the 'T' in Britain"?

Regards,
ROBERT HEWITT,

Via email.

Lookalike

Rod Liddle

Elliot Morley

Sir,

I am appalled that the former editor of the Today programme has been fiddling his mortgage repayments, and relieved that he has been sacked. Oh, hang on... is that Rod Liddle or Elliot Morley?

KEIR SHIELS,

Cambridge.

Let them eat cake

Sir,

I work in the NHS and the other day a member of staff asked if she could buy a cake for a multi-agency meeting from the budget. I said she should buy the cake herself as we shouldn't spend taxpayers' money on cake. Did I do the right thing? Should I ask an MP if they would have done things differently?

Best wishes,
KIM TANNER,

Worcester.

PS: Your money is safe in my hands.

A poet writes...

Sir,

Re Lines on the Appointment of Ms Carol Ann Duffy as the First Woman Poet Laureate (Eye 1236).

E.J.Thribb's piece of fine poetry
Is really as good as can be
"Like an onion" you know
's not a metaphor though.
In fact, it is a simile.

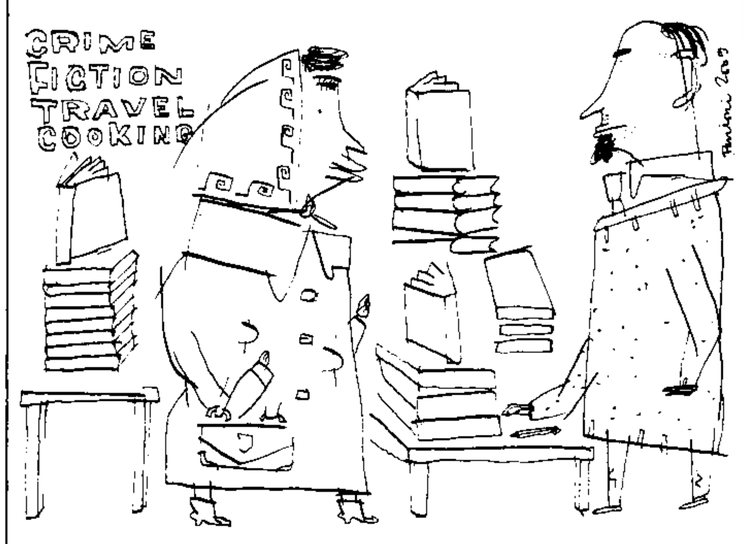
If Thribb is a little confused
It is when "like" or "as" has been used.
No wonder that he
Failed his GCSE
When this rule he has clearly abused.

W. Wordsworth (retired)

KEITH TAIT,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I don't suppose you still have a copy of The Blunkett Tapes?"

Modest success

Sir,

Re Tayside ISTC (In the Back, Eye 1236). For your information, though he is far too modest to blow his own trumpet, the person who made the freedom of information request which revealed the details of the Tayside ISTC is retired clinical biochemist and Private Eye subscriber Dr John R. Evans (my father).

As a result of his request, NHS Tayside decided to publish the contract, though initially minus the crucial financial schedule. Eventually they concluded that the details of costs and activity could also be released. Dr Evans has been in contact with Allyson Pollock throughout his long fight for proper consultation and transparency.

The full story can be found on the Keep Our NHS Public website.

Keep up the good work!

Kind regards,
TOM EVANS,

Via email.

Network railing

Sir,

I must have missed something. At which point on the march towards eradicating misogyny in the workplace did the term "blonde honey" achieve equal status to "silly fucking black bitch" (HP Sauce, Eye 1236)?

Was this supposed to increase our disdain for Network Rail's HR muppet or was there some deeper irony that has passed me by?

Regards,
BILL GYSIN,

Via email.

Strike a light

Sir,

You tell us (Media News, Eye 1236) that the BBC's Director of News Helen Boaden announced that only 29 percent of NUJ members voted in a recent internal dispute at the BBC, whereas, you note, "In fact, 38 percent voted overwhelmingly for a strike".

Private Eye's long-running love-affair with the NUJ is legendary. Until the Telegraph's recent scoop, the NUJ was the most venal, snout-in-the-trough gang in recorded history, but they've never deserved blatant bollocks.

How can 38 percent vote overwhelmingly?

Fraternally,
J.L.A. HARTLEY,

Via email.

● Fair point. We should have made it clear that, of the 38 percent of staff who did vote, the result was overwhelmingly (around 90 percent) in favour of a strike. Ed.

Bono of contention

Sir,

The reason U2's Bono has "silly tinted glasses which he wears indoors" (Eye 1236, p17) is because he has a condition that makes his eyes unusually sensitive to light. Flashbulbs in particular cause him genuine problems. I know it's not your style to mock the afflicted, so I'll assume it was just an honest mistake. Don't worry, your subscription's safe!

Yours,
NICK MIDGLEY,

Lancaster.

Pseudo Names

... A friend of mine has just told me that the names appearing at the end of the letters in the Pseudo Names column are not real and are just made up. Is that true, as I can't believe it?

NYE EVE.

... I used to enjoy the exclusivity of the Pseudo Names column but now it appears that everyone is jumping on the bandwagon.

D. WERLD
ANNIE SWYFFE.

... Your continued publication of these witticisms are so good they give me an almost opiate-like rush. Thank you.

N. DAWE-FINN.

... Pseudo Names has built up such momentum that stopping it would not be easy. Even if you put the brakes on now it would take a very long time to come to a halt.

SUE PETANKA.

... I see your recent correspondent Tim O'Tay is unable to contribute to the next issue as he is washing his hair. Coincidentally, I am in the same position and as we both obviously have Irish heritage I wonder if we are by any chance related?

ALBERT O'BALSAM.

... My identical twin and I fear this series will never end.

RON & RON FREVVER.

... brilliant cover on current edition... pigs in troughs etc etc. Give us more please.

CHRIS P. BACON.

... Please don't end Pseudo Names. It will kill me.

DICKIE HART.

... At 4pm each day, there's nothing better than sitting down with a nice cup of Darjeeling and a Digestive, putting your feet up and reading through the amusing Pseudo Names.

TINA BISKETT.

... Seriously, is there anyone who finds the Pseudo Names section of Private Eye funny?

HANS ZUPP.

... The very fact that so many of us find Pseudo Names so amusing just proves how much we all share in common.

JEAN GNOME (no relation).

... We predict your Pseudo Names feature will run for a decade or more, but will eventually end in acrimony and creative differences between members of your team.

JOHN-PAUL GEORGE
ANNE DRINGO.

... To those calling for an end to the Pseudo Names correspondence, perhaps some of your older or more learned readers may know of a suitable legal riposte.

C.R. KELL
V. PRESSDRAM.

... Pseudo Names has been on the go for several months now. Don't you think you are stretching it a bit?

ELLA STICK.

Pedantry Corner

... 'Piloti' refers (Eye 1236) to "St Mirrin's Football Club" in Paisley. This should of course be St Mirren, who are in the Scottish Premier League (albeit currently bottom). They have indeed recently moved to a new ground which has, I understand, been "assisted" by Tesco.

PETER FLEMING.

... Your correspondent Paul Spillane is, I suspect, wrong in his correction of David Cameron's exclamation "Et tu, Borus?". "Et tu, Bore?" would be correct if the mayor's name were Borus, but it is, of course, Boris. This implies that it's a third declension masculine noun (goes like "Civis") and the correct singular vocative would be "Et tu, Boris?" Not very exciting, I'm afraid.

JOHN RADFORD.

... I don't think I'd want to rely on the travel agent in the cartoon on p24 of Eye 1236, who is standing in front of a poster saying "Visit the BRONTE COUNTRY – come to HOWA..." Does he think the Bronte sisters lived in the great Yorkshire house Castle Howard, or in the fictional literary location of Howards End? In fact the village where the sisters lived is called Haworth.

VIRGINIA KNIGHT (Dr).

... Bruce Brandon, Pedantry Corner, Eye 1236 may be correct about the literal distinction between "fastest" (highest top speed) and "quickest" (best time over a set distance) but in Formula One parlance that is not what the words mean. The "fastest" car is the one with the best recorded time over a single qualifying lap. This is usually done using brand-new tyres and carrying minimum fuel. The "quickest" car is the one with the best performance over a race distance. This is affected by many factors such as tyre degradation, amount of fuel carried, changing track conditions, driver consistency, number of pit stops etc.

Because teams now choose how much fuel to carry during qualifying, a slower car with a very low fuel load can be "fastest", but not necessarily "quickest".

How sad am I?

ANDREW DENNY.

... You have fallen into the common trap of incorrectly crediting the "Four Yorkshiremen" sketch to Monty Python ("Me And My Spoon", issue 1236). While the Monty Python team did perform this sketch in their live shows, it was the "At Last the 1948 Show" cast who wrote and first performed it.

Our Dad would have removed our spleens and eaten them for tea for making a mistake like that.

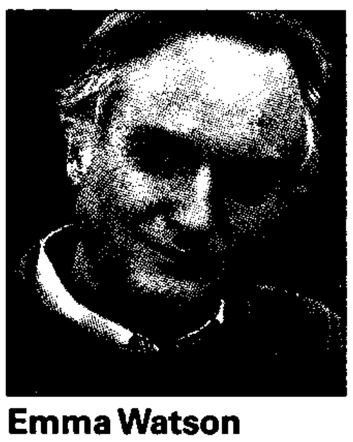
NEIL CUMMING.

... In Eye 1236 you reproduce a letter sent to the Telegraph by Sir Herbert Gusset. I am afraid that Sir Herbert is incorrect in claiming that Diana Rigg was in the original series of The Avengers. Steed's first sidekick was played by Ian Hendry, who was replaced for the second series by Honor Blackman, the first female Avenger.

What time we wasted when we were young.

DAVID DUNN.

Lookalike



Emma Watson

Richard Dawkins

Sir,

I wondered if you had noticed the striking similarity between these two noted members of the English illuminati – perhaps there is a humorous caption that your speech writers could develop for this clear family resemblance?

ALASDAIR,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"[There's] bound to be a deeply beating heart inside that young brain."
BILL LESLIE, Sky Sports
(Seth Gillman)

"... He [Fletcher] is an industrial player..."
JIMMY ARMFIELD, Radio 5 Live
(Derrick Scholey)

"There were no questions asked when Michael Owen was taken off. 55 seconds later all the questions were answered when Martins scored."
Sky Sports News
(Tony Hamilton)

"I only watch the replays afterwards."
GEOFF BOYCOTT, Radio 4
(Peter Quinn)

"It wasn't a comeback. I always intended to come back."
BARRY McGUIGAN, Radio 5 Live
(T.W. Hoyle)

Hong Kong handover

Sir,

In Issue 1235 of your august organ, 'Squarebasher' under the heading "Gurkha Trifles" makes the rather startling assertion that the future of Hong Kong was being discussed in 1999.

I well remember "The Black Watch" parading in the pouring rain as midnight, and hand-over of the Crown Colony to Beijing, on 30th June 1997 was approaching. The "future" had been decided long before (already in 1984, I think).

Yours faithfully,
GOSTA BERGHOLTZ,

Zürich, Switzerland.

By Anonymous

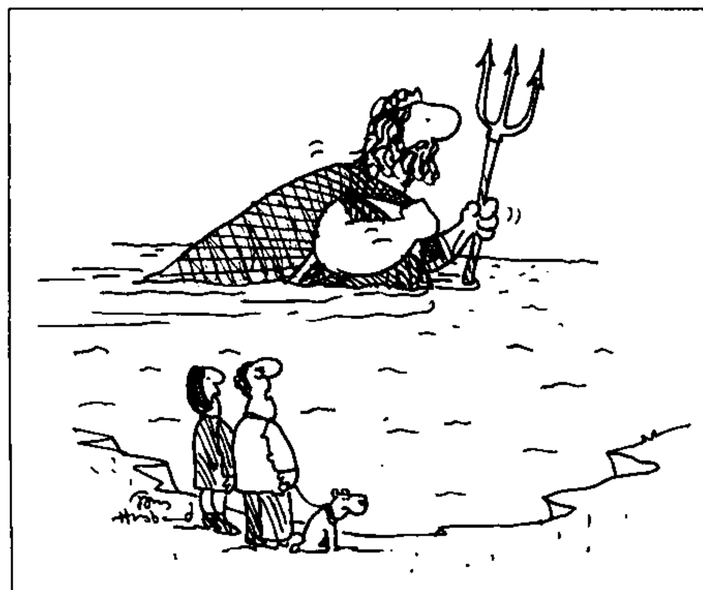
Sir,

According to your reviewer, "Given that almost no one writes articles under their real name (on Wikipedia), questions of provenance and authority must inevitably arise."

Absolutely, 'Bookworm'. And, er 'M.D.', 'Dr B Ching', 'Piloti', 'Slicker', 'Lunchtime O'Boulez'...

Best wishes to you all
(whoever you are),
JOHN HARRIS,

Edinburgh.



"Well, we're not going to see any dolphins with him around..."

Letter from **Rome**

from Our Own Correspondent

BY now the whole world knows about Noemi Letizia's 18th birthday party and her illustrious guest, and everybody seems to have come to the same conclusion about their relationship. Our top TV personality and prime minister, Silvio "I'm more popular than Obama" Berlusconi, is where he loves to be: on all the front pages.

Wife Veronica's announcement that she could no longer live with a man who "frequents minors" has let our imaginations run wild with what sort of dirt she might divulge after the divorce. That said, Silvio wasn't yet divorced from his first wife when Veronica had their first child, so it is unlikely we will judge him too harshly. His continuing popularity suggests that for every church-going Catholic who has been turned off by the thought of a 72-year-old cavorting with a 17-year-old, some of us have been turned on by having such a swaggering Lothario running our country.

Funnily enough it was our normally docile right-wing press that was particularly critical of Berlusconi's selection of a number of showgirls as candidates for the European elections (reversed in an attempt to appease his wife), and it ran with the Noemi scandal.

Berlusconi's new party, The Freedom People, unites his old Forza Italia with its largest ally, the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), which had been led by Gianfranco Fini, an old-school fascist reborn as a "post-fascist" liberal democrat. Fini hasn't been too happy with the arrangement, although rumours of a Blair-Brown style "Granita" deal might help explain why he capitulated. He grumbles from the sidelines, and the right-wing media's criticisms of Berlusconi are in line with Fini's snapping at the heels of his master. Silvio threw him a bone a few days after the revelations by deciding to dump boatloads of immigrants in Libya instead of bringing them to an Italian port for identification and processing.

Silvio's opponents hope the latest scandal is an opportunity to catch him out with a barefaced lie. The best they have come up with so far is his demonstrably false claim that the girl's father had been a driver for his old pal Benito Craxi. Bringing Craxi into the discussion seems foolish. Craxi was a convicted crook, part of a corrupt political establishment that had been put in place with the help of a United States that was petrified Italy was the one country in western Europe where communists might gain power.

Curiously, it is to the east that Silvio now tends to look for allies – he and Putin are great friends. The two men share many tastes, although it seems journalists in Russia, perhaps with an eye on self-preservation, are warier of writing about them. When a Russian hackette used a press conference in Italy with Silvio and Vladimir to ask about Putin's relationship with a young gymnast, Berlusconi mimed shooting her with a machine gun.

Another thing they have in common is a desire to hold on to absolute power behind the scenes, with a straight man up front to take the blows. Silvio has let it be known that he intends to stand for election as president of the republic, but only when constitutional changes make the position more powerful. That he has chosen Fini as his Medvedev figure seems clear, given the way Fini rolled over and allowed his party to be swallowed whole by the Freedom People.

The gangster capitalism and concentration of power in Putin's Russia seems to be heading our way with each of Berlusconi's attempted constitutional amendments, meaning some of America's old fears of us turning towards Russia finally seem credible: it isn't a looming communist threat we face, but that of a personality cult presiding over rampant gangsterism.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The acceptance of cow urine as a potent medicine is increasing day by day," Om Prakash of the RSS (National Volunteers' Organisation) told a press conference in Haridwar, "and a revolution is now underway. We refer to it as *gau jal*, or powerful cow water, and it has immense potential to cure various diseases. We have recently developed a soft drink formula, like Coca Cola, with *gau jal* as the base, and sent it to our laboratory in Lucknow for testing. Once it becomes available as a cold drink in bottles and cans, demand will definitely increase."

Prakash, who is Head of the RSS's Cow Protection Department, insisted that powerful cow water cola could soon become a leading player in India's lucrative soft drinks market. "Many colas currently on the market are harmful, to the extent that they can be used as pesticides, whereas *gau jal* is not only natural, but cost-effective too. I have been involved in the promotion of bovine urine for four decades, and am proud to say it is now being used in the manufacture of everything from biscuits and toothpaste to soap and foot powder. And once we find a way to prevent the drink developing an unpleasant odour in the summer heat, *gau jal* cola will be further justification of the high stature accorded to the sacred cow in Indian culture." *(Express India, 10/2//09. Spotter: J. Bennett)*

– o –

"Stealing an entire church is a somewhat serious sin," Father Vitaly of the Russian Orthodox Church told reporters in the central Russian village of Komarovo, "and this is not a unique case. In many Russian villages nowadays, entire churches are being dismantled by thieves, under the noses of the local authorities. They are vanishing, brick by brick, thereby depriving people of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

"Because the Church of Christ's Resurrection stood in an isolated area, thieves were able to steal it completely without anyone noticing, even though it was a two-storey building in excellent structural condition, and had been there since 1809. We suspect local builders in the village are behind the theft, but when we asked them about it, they shrugged and suggested the disappearance could possibly be an act of God. We have no proof against them, but we shall be looking closely at the bricks they use in their next buildings. We have notified the police, but regrettably this sort of thing seems to be becoming normal in the twenty-first century. Some people have no respect for religion anymore." (ABC News [Australia], 13/11/08. Spotter: Mal Function)

– o –

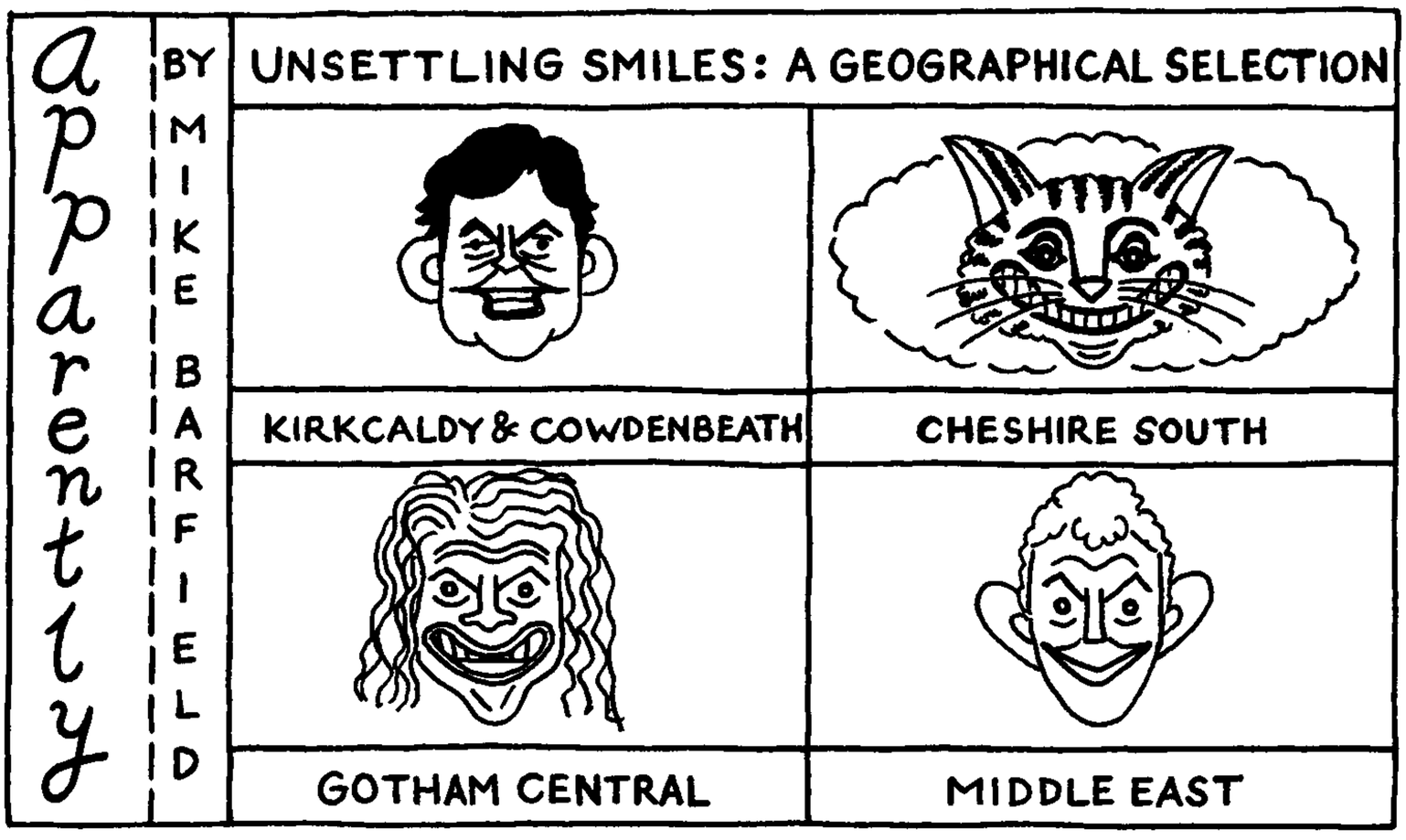
"Should it be illegal to spread something on one's genitalia that might smell or taste nice to a dog, in order to tempt the dog to lick it off?" Agriculture Minister Eskil Erlandsson asked the Swedish Parliament in the Riksdag building in Stockholm. "Should it be permitted to stroke a bitch's teats with love, or should that be classified as animal sexual abuse? These are the difficulties faced by courts when trying to differentiate between affection and abuse, and it's why a law banning sex with animals would be almost impossible to draft."

Erlandsson's remarks caused controversy in Sweden last autumn, after a thirty-strong network of self-proclaimed zoophiles was discovered to be operating throughout the country. "I have never forced myself onto my bitch," said a forty-five-year-old managing director on a southern farm, when confronted by reporters. "Any of the times I did anything with her, she was the one who backed into me

and provoked it. She was on heat and made herself available. There were also times when she didn't want it, and then I backed out immediately."

Another group of bestialists told reporters in Smaland about a colleague called "the donkey man. He has a llama and a couple of donkeys. We tried it with a donkey but it didn't work. But we did have sex with the llama."

According to the Swedish Animal Welfare Agency, 115 cases of bestiality were reported between 2000-05, but no criminal charges were brought. *(The Local [Sweden], 11/11/08. Spotter: Fred Duthy)*



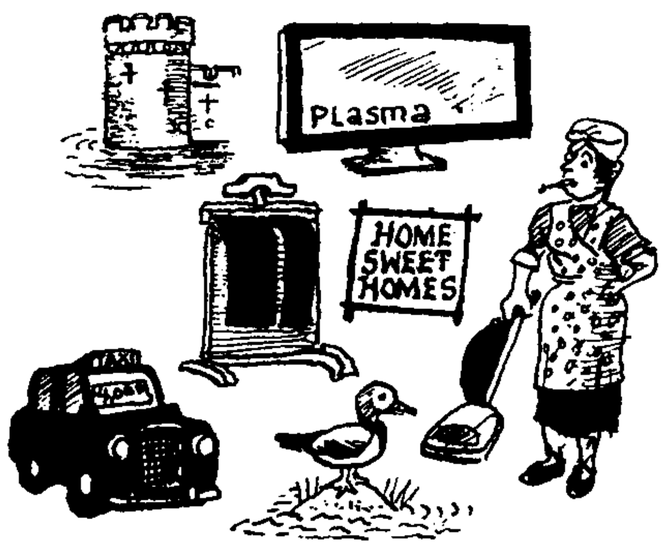
Lines Written On The Resignation Of Speaker Martin

BY **WILLIAM REES-MCGONAGALL** *(Nominated By Sean Connery As Scottish Poet Of The Millennium)*

'Twas in the year sixteen hundred and ninety five
That Sir John Trevor, speaker of the House of Commons, was still alive.
But, alas, he was found guilty of a high crime and misdemeanour
And I'm not just talking about paying your brother for your cleaner.

Sir John was dragged screaming from the Speaker's chair
In front of all the MPs who were gathered there,
But the nation then had a very long time to wait
Before another Speaker was to suffer a similarly ignominious fate.
Three hundred and fourteen years to be exact
Before the next Speaker had to be humiliatingly sacked.

Michael Martin was this miscreant's name
Who brought his office into unparalleled shame.
He was known unkindly as 'Gorbals Mick'
Merely because he was working class Glaswegian and very thick *(surely 'Roman Catholic'? Ed.)*
Mr Martin had presided over an avalanche of sleaze
Which had been freely indulged in by almost all the MPs.



It seemed they had taken leave of their senses
When it came to claiming outrageous expenses.
As each day unfolded, the revelations grew more obscene -
One of them even claimed for an £8,500 telly with a plasma screen.
Another defined the very heights of excess
By making taxpayers pay for a Corby De Luxe trouser press.

And that was just Labour, but the Tories had no cause to gloat
For one of them had claimed for the cleaning of his moat.
Mr Douglas Hogg was this man's unfortunate name
For getting snouts in the trough was the nature of the game.

Even the Lib Dems were not immune
With finger pointing at Mr Christopher Huhne.
And though you would expect his motives to be finer
Sir Ming Campbell had claimed for an interior designer.

And so it went on, this roll of shame -
It seemed scarcely any of them were free from blame.
And as these horrors came to light
Speaker Martin became ever more uptight.

For he had tirelessly worked for many years
To prevent such scandals reaching the public's ears.
And he himself was far from squeaky clean
For his wife's visit to Tesco he had claimed for a hired limousine.

And when the press began to rake the muck
He called, in at our expense, Messrs Carter-Fuck.
But the Speaker had misjudged the mood of the nation
Which was one of furious indignation.

The entire country was now united in anger
All the way from Lowestoft to Bangor.
Still this Caledonian clown clung onto his job
For it was worth to him more than a wee few bob.

Plus a luxury apartment - not to mention
An enormous gold-plated and index-linked pension.
"I will nae 'gang awa'," he told the MPs
As they put down motions saying "Will you resign, please?"

But finally there was a knock at the door and there stood a man with a frown,
This late-night caller was none other than the Rt. Honourable Gordon Brown.
"The game is up my fine Scottish friend.
For you, Gorbals Mick, this is the end."

And so it's the end too for this epic verse
For of all the speakers in English parliamentary history not one had been worse.
(With the possible exception of Sir John Trevor,
Though on second thoughts I think Martin was the worst ever.)

© W. Rees-McGonagall. *(A podcast of Roger McGoughagall reading this poem is available on YouResignTube.com)*

Who Should Be The New Speaker?

You choose

❶ JOANNA LUMLEY, universally respected political campaigner, the former Ab Fab superstar would do more than anyone to restore the integrity of the Commons (unless she becomes Queen). ***11-8 on.***

❷ MELVYN BRAGG, looking for work after the end of the South Bank Show, as a member of the House of Lords, Melvyn (known as the Barg of Wigton) is only a short walk from the hallowed chair. ***20-1 against.***

❸ ESTHER RANTZEN. Looking for work since the end of *That's Life.* Her huge experience of vegetables shaped like genitalia could prove invaluable. ***Non-runner.***

❹ KEN LIVINGSTONE, much-loved and highly-respected newt-fancier and former mayor. Now out of work, Ken would relish the chance to criticise Boris from the Speaker's chair. ***10-1 against.***

❺ ARSENE WENGER, although French and a football manager, the Arsenal boss is universally respected as a leader of men and speaks English much better than the disgraced Martin. ***100-1 against.***

❻ SIR STEPHEN FRY, polymath whose relaxed attitude to fraud would make him feel at home with his fellow members. ***1000-1 against.***

❼ DESMOND TUTU, universally admired anti-apartheid campaigner, the former Archbishop would be the first openly black clergyman to become Speaker. Although he lives in South Africa "he could easily do the job via video link," says friends. ***Scratched.***

❽ SIR PEREGRINE WORSTHORNE, veteran journalist and *bon viveur*, Sir Peregrine would restore a sense of agreeable civilised values to the Mother of Parliaments. ***1001-1 against.***

❾ TONY BLAIR, the much-loved and highly-respected former prime minister has let it be known that he has "a window free" in 2012 and would be prepared to do the job "if the money was right". ***2-1 on favourite.***

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

WE DISCOVER AMAZING REVELATIONS ABOUT MPs' EXPENSES

by Nick Story

PAINSTAKING research by this newspaper has uncovered the extraordinary story that is on the front page of the Daily Telegraph every morning.

Our team of top investigative journalists uncovered the truth behind Parliament's traditional confidentiality by painstakingly sifting through hundreds of columns of details contained on pages 1-94 of the Daily Telegraph.

But did money change hands?

The editor of this paper is, of course, reluctant to reveal our sources, but he is not ashamed to admit that he bought the information from a trustworthy newsvendor (a Mr W.H.S.). "I did not pay the ludicrous sums that are being bandied about. In fact, the amount I paid is close to 90p *and* I got a free bottle of water, which is a pretty good deal when you consider the public interest involved."

What you will read tomorrow: *We don't know because the Telegraph hasn't come out yet.*

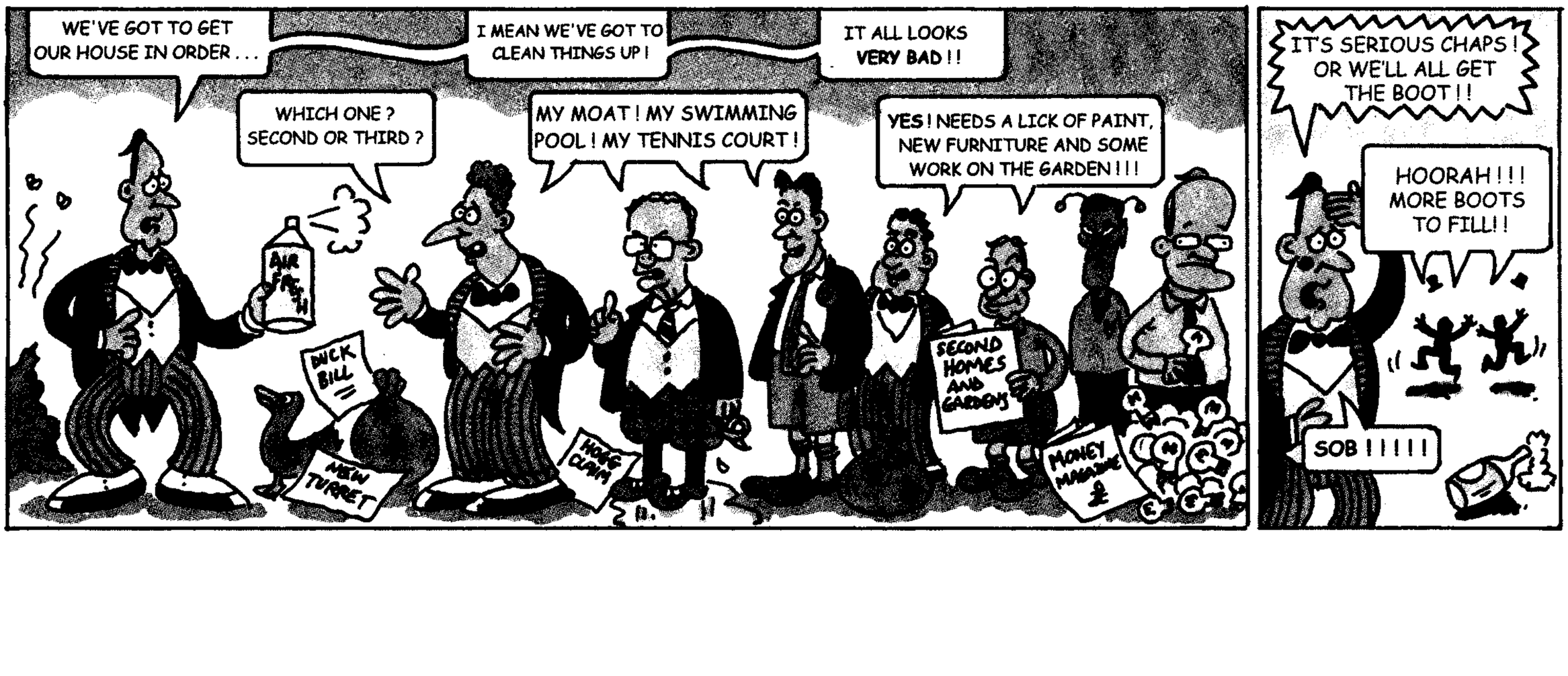
OPINION

THE spectacle of greedy men and women lining their pockets with the proceeds of falsified expenses and unwarranted allowances has sadly gone from Fleet Street for ever.

That is why it is so annoying to see all those MPs still at it. How dare they? That's our job. Or it was until the bloody bean-counters cut everything. I mean, it's got so bad I'm not even drunk when I'm writing this. What sort of journalism is that? Come on, Mr Managing Editor, let me at least take one of my colleagues out to lunch and put him down as "senior political contact"!! Bastards!

© All newspapers.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


WE'VE GOT TO GET OUR HOUSE IN ORDER . . .
I MEAN WE'VE GOT TO CLEAN THINGS UP !
IT ALL LOOKS VERY BAD !!
WHICH ONE ? SECOND OR THIRD ?
MY MOAT ! MY SWIMMING POOL ! MY TENNIS COURT !
YES ! NEEDS A LICK OF PAINT, NEW FURNITURE AND SOME WORK ON THE GARDEN ! ! !
AIR FRESH
DUCK BILL
NEW TURRET
HOME CLAIM
SECOND HOMES AND GARDENS
MONEY MANAGER
IT'S SERIOUS CHAPS ! OR WE'LL ALL GET THE BOOT ! !
HOORAH ! ! ! MORE BOOTS TO FILL ! !
SOB ! ! ! ! !

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 45

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

Let me say at once that I share the pain and anger that all of you feel at the actions of the renegades, the wreckers and the traitors in our midst.

The entire political class has not only betrayed the people of Britain – worse still, they have betrayed your Supreme Leader.

Let me tell you how personally disgusted and affronted I have been to learn of the obscene actions of certain comrades whose names will live in infamy as by-words for greed, corruption, theft, extortion and embezzlement.

Let the roll of shame be blazoned in the memories of all British citizens.

Comrade Morley. Once he was universally lauded as one of our most capable and trusted Commissars, charged with the supervision of our British collective farms and the efficient disbursement of our EU farm payments.

Today, ex-Comrade Morley hangs his head in shame, having been revealed as no better than a common criminal.

Comrade Shahad Malik. Once he was the rising star of our Justice ministry, charged with assisting Comrade Straw in his onerous tasks of building giant multi-storey prisons to accommodate millions of hard-working British criminals. Comrade Malik has brought disgrace on himself, on our movement and on the whole Moslem communirty, who would be entirely forgiven for dealing with him under the dictates of Sharia law by cutting off his hands and stoning him to death.

Now let me turn to **Commissar Blears**, a member of the Politburo no less, whose cynical and lamentable crimes of Second-Home-Flippism have appalled the nation. She is a disgrace and, after talking to her, I can only say that Hazel is doing a good job and has my full support.

As have the rest of the Politburo, including **Commissars Darling, Hoon** and **Purnell** who, Comrade Blears tells me, have behaved no better than she has, ie entirely legitimately and she will be damned if she goes and they don't and that she knows where the bodies are buried.

I have no idea what Comrade Blears is talking about, but perhaps we should continue with the Roll of Shame and indeed end it by singling out for opprobrium the illiterate Scottish buffoon, my old friend the former Speaker, ex-**Comrade Martin**.

The British people were rightly incandescent with rage to discover that this oafish Glaswegian clown knew exactly what was going on, and yet deliberately kept me in the dark about the whole festering cesspit of iniquity.

When your Supreme Leader learned of this from the Daily Telegraph, he at once went round personally to the Speaker's Palace and informed him that he would be punished for his failure by being expelled from his post with nothing more than a peerage, the loyal thanks of his party and a £2 million pension.

Let that be a lesson to all those who wish to betray the Supreme Leader by their shameless Klepto-FredtheShreddist-handintillism.

But they will not succeed. Your Supreme Leader has been working night and day since this morning on a Five-Point Plan to restore the people's trust in the workings of their Government and Democracy.

My Plan will be as follows:

1. It is clear that the democratic system as presently constituted has failed.

2. The system needs reforming from top to bottom.

3. The number of People's Delegates to our Parliament needs to be very drastically reduced.

4. I suggest that this reduction should be from the present number of 648 delegates to a more rational and manageable figure, say one.

5. I suggest that that one person should be someone whose actions have remained above reproach and whose whole life has been given to serving the interests of our party and our country.

Comrades will have no difficulty in identifying the man in question.

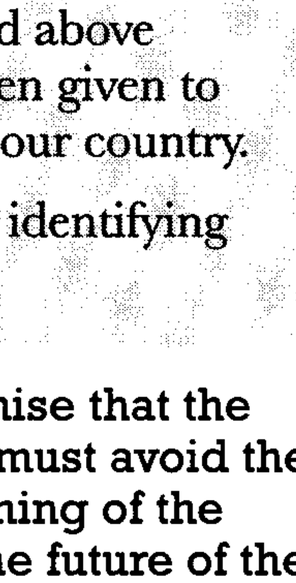
So let us at this critical time recognise that the darkest hour is before the dawn. We must avoid the chaos that threatens the ordered running of the State. You must all rest assured that the future of the People's Democracy is in the best possible hands – my own.

Keep smiling,

Gordon Brown

Supreme Leader

"I have apologised and admitted that I have done nothing wrong"



Taken from The Little Brown Book, Chapter 94, 'Chaos Theory and the Art of Supreme Loss Leadership'.

News In Brief

CALL FOR CONVICTION POLITICIANS

AS THE political world teetered on the brink of complete collapse, there were nationwide calls for "politicians with convictions".

Said a spokesman for the newly-formed Voters Alliance, "The sooner we get these convictions, the better – I'm thinking five years for fraud."

He continued, "The sooner we get our MPs locked up behind bars the safer we will all be."

But last night the chief of Britain's prisons lashed out at what he called "these lunatic proposals".

"Britain's prisons are full of honest, decent criminals. I do not want them mixing with low-life MPs who will be a harmful influence on them and will almost certainly set them on a lifetime of crime."

CITY ATTACKS 'COMMONS BONUS CULTURE'

FORMER RBS boss Sir Fred Goodwin last night led attacks by senior disgraced City bosses over the culture of greed in the Commons.

"A culture of unparalleled greed appears to have become systemic within the House of Commons," Sir Fred told reporters from his yacht in Majorca.

"Greedy MPs need to understand the very real anger of City bankers who didn't get a slice of that."

BRITISH MOVIE 'NOT TO BE SET ON COUNCIL ESTATE'

THERE WAS shock today in Cannes after it was confirmed that a new British film wouldn't be set on a depressingly grim council estate filled with single mums and violent, thuggish chavs.

"We've decided instead to set it in a depressingly grim Soho Private Members Club where everyone is trying to sell new British films set on depressingly grim council estates filled with single mums and violent thuggish chavs," said a man in a black t-shirt.

UNREPENTANT, DOUR DISCREDITED SCOTSMAN REFUSES TO GO WITH DIGNITY

Mr Gordon Brown today *(cont. p. 94)*

Duck At Centre Of Political Storm

by Our Westminster Staff Huey, Dewey and Thirsty Will Lewie

A HAMPSHIRE duck was yesterday accused of claiming public money to fund his lavish second duck house whilst actually having a number of other undeclared residencies in ponds and lakes around the country.

Mr Duck angrily denied any impropriety, claiming he had broken no rules.

Mr Duck

When pressed, he admitted that taxpayers' money had been used to clean the moat around the recently refurbished duck house, and that the residence had actually been used by his daughter Jemima. "But there is no question of fowl play," he said.

Following calls for Mr Duck to be shot and roasted, he told local reporters: "Everyone else is just jealous because my Duck House is very large and looks like Duckingham Palace."

Mr Duck yesterday – keeping a low profile

However, BBC Royal Reporter Rose Mallard said that the house looked nothing like *(Cont. p. 94)*

THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER

EYE GUIDE TO HISTORY

Great British Generals

No 94 **General Gordon of Kathmandu**

May 22nd 2009

It was one of the most famous actions in British military history. The beleaguered General Gordon was under fierce attack by a horde of 3 elderly Gurkhas and an actress.

Gordon held out resolutely for a couple of days before bravely giving in completely.

He stood on the steps of Number Ten Downing Street and shouted, "I surrender" before passing forever into legend.

THAT RESHUFFLE IN FULL

HAZEL BLEARS moves from Communities and Local Government to Holloway.

GEOFF HOON switches from Transport to Wormwood Scrubs.

JAMES PURNELL resigns as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to become Secretary of the Bridge Club at Ford Open Prison *(That's enough reshuffle)*

Maddie

After a long gap there have been further sightings of Maddie stories in the British tabloids.

These are believed to have been the work of a notorious paedophile hunter.

We can now reveal her as Rebekah Wade, who has been taking an unhealthy interest in the story all along.

ON OTHER PAGES: Pix, Gossip, Speculation, Hopes Raised, Story Denied, Apologies etc etc.

From Gnome Souvenirs

THE JORDAN MEMORIAL PLATE

TO commemorate the historic and tragic break-up of the marriage of Britain's best-loved Jungle Celebrity Couple, Pete André and Katie Price, Gnome Heritage Products proudly presents this stunning plate-themed Jordan memento.

Designed by the Chinese master craftsmen of Tit Fo Tat and lovingly tooled from authentic porcelain-style silicon, this wonderful heirloom is not only a moving and heartwarming souvenir of one of TV's most enduring divorces but is also a genuine investment to be treasured by your children, your children's children and their multiple surrogate children from Mumbai before they were adopted by homophobes and the Family Court stepped in to rule that no further information could be published in this advertisement.

WARNING: Do not expose your Jordan Memorial Plate to direct sunlight as infra-red rays from the sun may cause the image to peel and fade, revealing Susan Boyle/Jade Goody/ Princess Diana image underneath.

(Katie) Price £1.30 (set of 300) Send now to:
Jordan Plate Offer, Unit 94,
The OK! Trading Estate, Bracknell.

"I'll give it two more minutes and if there isn't any shagging, I'm pissing off"

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The Appointment Of Mr Bear Grylls As Chief Scout

So. Congratulations to
Bear Grylls.

You are the new
Chief Scout.

Yes, we have
Seen you on
TV.

An inspiration to
All Boy and
Girl Scouts.

You can show
Them how to
Survive by cooking
Spiders, snakes or voles.

If they survive
Long enough
They could even
Grill bears.

E.J. Thribb (Poetry Proficiency Badge, Tooting & Balham 'Wolverine' Pack)

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

HAZEL BLEARS

Could I begin by asking you whether you have more than one set of spoons?

Well, yes, as a matter of fact I do. But I must make it clear that these spoons here are my principal spoons. My other set of spoons are in my constituency home. I need to keep them there because I spend a lot of time there.

So you have two sets of spoons?

No, you mustn't misquote me. I have three sets of spoons altogether. One is my principal set of spoons, as I have already explained. Then there are my second spoons, which are vital for my constituency. Then there are my third collection of spoons which last year I designated, for allowance purposes, as my main set, so that I could quite legitimately claim on my second set under the 'Second Spoon Allowances' rule.

Surely this is dishonest?

Not at all: It's all very clearly laid down in the Spoon Book, rule 61(b) Cutlery Allowances. Everything I have done is perfectly within the rules.

But haven't you sold off some of these spoons at quite a handsome profit without paying any capital gains tax?

(Long pause). Oh yes, so I have. I'd better pay that money back before the Prime Minister sacks me. (Mobile phone rings). Oh dear, it looks as if he has.

I was going to ask you, as is traditional in this column, whether anything amusing has ever happened to you in connection with a spoon, but it obviously just has! Ha, ha, ha!

NEXT WEEK: *Frank Field: "Me And My Field".*

The Book of Benjamin

1. And it came to pass that young Benjamin, that is called Net-an-yahu, was chosen to rule over the children of Israel, in place of Ehud.
2. And Benjamin had been chosen because he had promised his people that the smiting should continue as heretofore, even an hundredfold.
3. And a voice came to him in the night saying, "Rise up, Benjamin, and go unto the House that is called White.
4. "And there ye shall find the Messiah, who is called O-bama, which is to say wonderful, counsellor, exciting, a real breath of fresh air."
5. And Benjamin did as he was commanded, that he might pay homage to the new King.
6. And O-bama looketh on him and liketh him not.
7. And O-bama saith unto Benjamin, "Hearkeneth unto me, thou son of Lik-ud. Gettest thou this straight. Things have changethed around here since the days of the Burning Bush (so named because he burned everything that is in sight)."
8. And Benjamin was filled with dread at these words of O-bama, for he feared that the days of smiting might be over.
9. And O-bama saith unto the son of Net-an-yahu, "Know you that I am looking for a settlement."
10. And Benjamin replied, "I can sell you one, a very nice one, built only last week in the land of Judea, with a pool, an avocado farm, its own road and a wall to keep out the Hamas-ites, the Araf-ites, and all the other -ites."
11. But O-bama laugheth not (and not because he hath heard the joke before).
12. "I am serious," he told the son of Net-an-yahu. "From now on there will be no more settlements of the kind that ye describe."
13. "And nor will there be any of the type that *you* describe," saith Benjamin privily to himself, under his breath.
14. And so the son of Net-an-yahu returneth home, pondering in his heart the words of O-bama, but not deeply or for too long.

(Here endeth the lesson which is never learned)

A message from the Mayor of London

Boris Johnson

Boris's Wizard Wheeze

What ho, Londoners! How about this for a first-rate boffo idea? Forget the Bendy Buses – we're going to fill London's streets with millions of those little electric car johnnies! Just think, no smelly petrol fumes, no growling engines, and everyone zipping about, happy as Larry at 5mph! That's brilliant, BoJo, I hear you say. So London's going to lead the world in saving the planet. Correct! Brownie points to Boris – or should I say 'Greenie points'. And certain other Tory leaders looking a bit silly! (No names, eh, Dave?) He may have got a First, but certain other chaps from Eton have turned out to be a lot brainier when it comes to inventing the electric car and saving the world!

And how does it work, I hear you ask? Simple. Just like your mobile– just plug it in and some gorgeous tottie rings you up – whoops, I mean your wife, tells you to pick up some carrots on the way home. Anyway, where was I? These cars. Fantastic! They run on solar power with a wind turbine on top, and all for free. I may not have got that bit right. I leave all the technical stuff to the boffins.

Cheerio!

Boris

"BoJo – Working For A Switched-On London"

CAPTAIN'S BLOG

Gordon Brown's Most Recent Expenses Claim Exposed

- **£14.99** One bottle of whisky
- **£83.00** One revolver
- **£28.00** One mortice Chubb lock for room in Downing Street

THE BROON-ITES
THE SCOTTISH SCUNNERS SCUTTLING THE SPEAKER!
Fountain and Jamieson
WELL I HOPE WE'VE ALL LEARNED OOR LESSONS FRAE THE EXPENSES AFFAIR...
AYE, AH'VE CERTAINLY LEARNED A LESSON, ED BROON-BALLS. THERE'S NAE MPs GAIN' TAE GET ME OOT AFTER THIS!
THEY'VE HAD ONE JOCK'S HEID ON A PLATTER THIS WEEK, SO THEY'RE NOT GETTING TAE ME IN A HURRY! NAE CHANCE!
AYE, MEBBE SO, PA BROON.
BUT DAE YE THINK THIS VERRA EXPENSIVE MOAT ISNAE OVERKILL?
AH WISH AH'D THOUGHT OF IT YEARS AGO! HOOTS!
HENRY DAVIES

Nursery Times

Friday, May 29, 2009

NURSERYLAND'S OLDEST MOTHER

by **Hans Christian Democrat**

A 66 year old woman who lives in a shoe is expecting her first baby today but remains defiant in the face of criticism.

"I feel like a young woman," said the sexagenarian, "and I will probably have many more children. Possibly so many that I won't know what to do."

How it might look

Social Services expressed their concern about the potential consequences of "old parenting", which they said could include unsuitable diets – broth, lack of bread, etc – and, in extreme cases, physical abuse such as whipping soundly and putting to bed.

On other pages

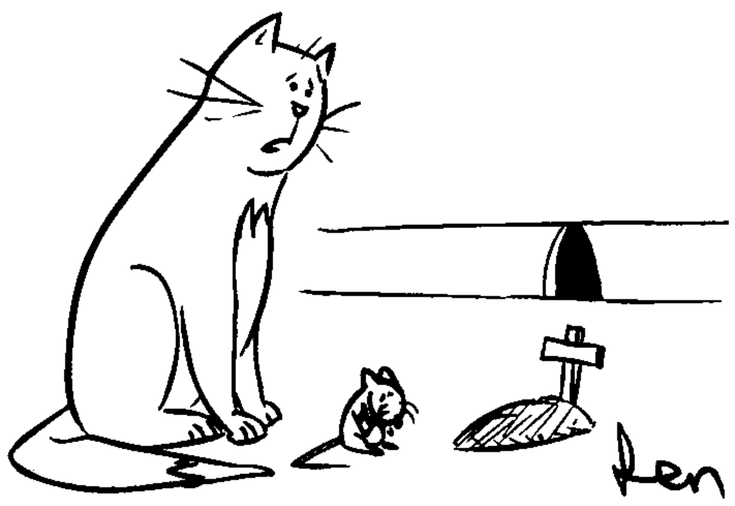
- Cat in Fiddle Shock – Calls for Resignation **2**
- "I will pay back stolen porridge," says Shamed Goldilocks **3**
- Crooked Man in Crooked House – "I Have Done Nothing Wrong" **94**

Satellite TV Highlights

Father Ped *Dave, Friday 9.30*

Classic episode where the Bishop orders Father Ped O'Phile to set up Craggy Island's first children's home, with the usual hilarious mix of child abuse, strange priests and child abuse.

Eye Rating *You will apologise eventually, Father, you will, you will, you will, you will.*



"I'm very sorry for your loss. If it's any consolation, he was delicious"

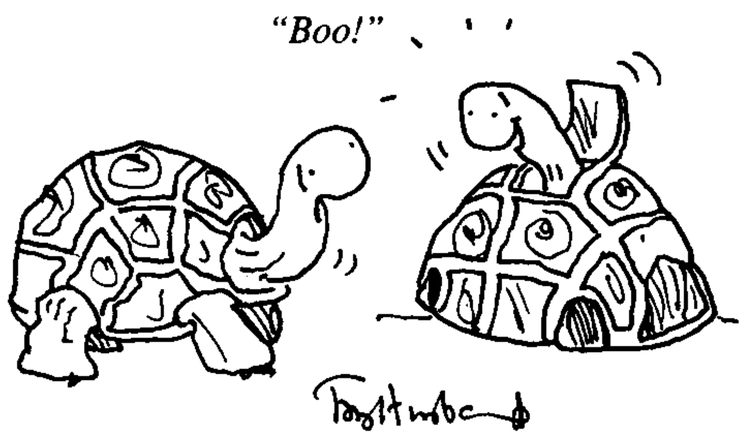
MILLIONS TO DIE IN KILLER HEATWAVES PREDICT METMEN

by Our Climate Staff **Patti O'Heater** and **Barbie Kew**

THE MET Office warns that temperatures this summer across Britain could soar as high as 150 degrees.

The Department of Health has been told to prepare for a pandemic of heat stroke every bit as disastrous as swine flu, avian flu or SARS.

Britain's fire authorities are predicting huge Australian bush-style fires which will sweep the country, laying waste whole communities; whilst flocks of feral wallabies run amok, rampaging through city centres and spreading rabies to millions of innocent toddlers and helpless pensioners, many of whom will already be dying of skin cancer if they haven't been eaten by starving polar bears fleeing from the fast-vanishing Arctic (*cont. p94*)



IMPORTANT ANCIENT FOSSIL DISCOVERED

by Our Natural History Staff
ARCHIE O'LOGIST

THE most significant find in the history of human evolution was unveiled yesterday in the House of Commons.

The world's earliest Liberal Democrat, nicknamed "Ming", is believed to be more than 4 million years old and could be the long-undiscovered missing link.

Ming *(Menzius campbellius campbellius)* is believed to have been able to walk, stand on his hind legs and even talk, said Sir David Attenborough. "He could easily evolve into the next Speaker of the House of Commons."

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Parliament in crisis

mes-age 2 brown the clown in clown town ● make public office truly transparant with glass walls so we can keep an eye on the theving scumm ● make public servent's serve "US" make them ware a jacket with mp on it and sweep the street's and clean toilet's for old folk ● ● an they can eat there dinner from a real trof – ***Eye_4_an_Eye***

agree 1000 persent eye4 ☺ let joana lumly an the gerkin's clear "OUTT" the house of common criminel's ● they think ethnics is a county in essex an now there busy cover-ing there own bat's ● ● ● – ***Broken_Britan***

callin him dugless hog is unfare 2 pig's
☺ juss call him MP theres no big-er insult – ***Hunny_pot***

Get rid of the lot and replace with real leaders: Esther Rantzen (PM), Joanna Lumley (Defence), Sir John Harvey-Jones (Industry), Jeremy Clarkson (Home Secretary), Sir Bobby Charlton (Sport and Morals), Sir Alan Sugar (Discipline), General Sir Michael Rose (Male Role Model), Susan Boil (Mentor for Youth), Tommy Cooper (Morale). – ***Brown_out***

I feel for our gracious Queen in these difficult times. What must she think of her "honourable members" as they fleece the taxpayer with their moats, castles and chandeliers? – ***Robert_"R"***

The man in the street hasn't a clue – that's why he is in the street. How can our elected representatives set proper standards if they are expected to live amid dirty moats and unkempt lawns? They would soon become a laughing stock. – ***Zicka_Zimba***

David Cameron did no more than enter the House of Commons. Then he did no more than drive the MPs from the chamber. Inasmuch and insofar as he did so do, then he did no more than Jesus, who did no more than drive the money lenders from the temple. – ***Mr_Salmon***

genral electian "WAT" ☺ u serius camron? MORE mp's? come back guy fork's all is fogiven – ***Pompey_Lad***

insted of electian may-be let people jus choos the ppl they want in wesmister? – ***Hayley_321***

The economy is picking up, David Cameron is shaping up, and Andy is storming up the rankings! Now I'm sucking my mints for a long hot summer! – ***Murray_ Maniac***

Time to end the disastrous democratic experiment. – ***Sword_of_Truth***

Teenage Boy 'Not His Own Father' Shock

by PAT ERNITY

IN AN extraordinary twist to the underage father saga that is being played out in the nation's tabloids, DNA tests have revealed that 13 month old Baby Alfie is NOT his own father.

The baby is said to be devastated, having previously entered the history books as the youngest parent of himself in Britain.

In fact, his father is a more conventional 15 month old boy from the same estate.

© News of the Weird

BBC Radio 3

Live from the Milan Opera House, La Scandala, Berlusconi's comic operetta *Cosi Fan Nostra*

The curtain rises to show Silvio, the Robber Baron, in his palazzo, surrounded by a chorus of beautiful teenage nymphs who sing about how they are shortly to be elected as members of the European Parliament *('We're All Going To Brussels On A Summer Holiday')*.

There is a loud noise from the courtyard outside. The chief of the local carabinieri has come to arrest Silvio again on charges of fraud, embezzlement, tax-evasion and election rigging (not to mention making advances to young women who are not his wife).

Silvio laughs scornfully and sings that he has already bribed his English lawyer, Signor Mills, to take the blame *('Tre Millione Euros')*.

The chief of police apologises for disturbing the Robber Baron on such a trivial matter. Silvio laughs and invites the carabinieri to join him in a celebratory banquet. *'Sono Immuno'* he sings in a haunting aria, in which he describes how he has passed a retrospective law giving him immunity from any crime he may have committed, or is currently committing even as we speak.

Silvio retires to a nearby secluded gazebo to discuss the European Union's policy on Uganda with one of his future MEPs, Signorina Rumpi di Pumpi.

DIARY

MR SPEAKER MARTIN GOES SHOPPING

And now I'm off shopping. And don't no one tell me I can't because I can, I'm allowed perfectly I'm allowed to, it's your money not mine I mean my money not yours and even if it is yours I can do with it what I want, it's no business of yours, so you know what you can do with those impertinent so-called questions of yours. "We have let you down very badly indeed," I tell the ordinary public. And it's true. We should have let them down far more skilfully. Order! Order!

I nip to a little store I know, very handy for Westminster. It goes by the name of Harrods. I find its prices competitive and it's also extremely worker-friendly. There are plenty of wee bargains to be had if you keep your pockets wide open and your hands outstretched.

When I go through the doors of a store, the first words that come into my head are: Order! Order! I order whatsoever I can. My first order is for a set of six large sapphire tumblers in a presentation case. In these difficult times, we must all remain aware of the opinion of the public at large, just in case they interfere. We should endeavour to pass on any savings to the ordinary man in the street. My bargain tumblers were £169, but I snapped them up for £159, giving the hard-pressed tax-payer a saving of no less than £10, and allowing me to claim back the difference. Good news in today's troublesome economic climate. Order! Order!

Talking of climate, Mrs Martin and myself will shortly be flying to "warmer climes", and good riddance to the lot of you. We like to "fly the flag" on British Airways Business Class. I am availing myself of a service commiserate compensate commensurate with the status and dignity of my former office if any. I speak for the country as a whole when I say no one wants to see the former holder of this great office travelling in third class, down on a level with those he used to represent. Order! Order!

And the passport of The Speaker and his lady wife must also be safeguarded for the nation. Luckily, Harrods offers hard-wearing Leather Passport Holders in imitation leather crocodile skin, with the famous prestige Harrods signature embossed in gold on the inside cover. The exclusive suede lining offers a deluxe finish both inside and out. Yes, there will be cynics who protest that £39.95 is too much for this great country to pay to preserve the dignity of their beloved Speaker's passport. To them I say this. What do they know they don't know nothing if you have something to say say it to my face, it's none of your so-called business, please give me the credit of some experience, and if you don't like it go jump in the loch, Order! Order!

Cufflinks always come in handy, particularly on a shirt. No-one should betray his high office by failing to wear cufflinks to match his shirt and tie – Emerald for green, Amber for orange, Sapphire for Blue, Onyx for black, Diamond for white. So, in retirement, I head straight for the cufflink counter and fill my working man's pockets with a number of these very practical and hard-wearing appliances. To those who say I should first take them to the counter and pay for them, I say this. I've accepted the bling I mean the blame and apologised profoundly and now piss off the lot of ye'. On the way back, I ask my wee chauffeur to wait awhile outside The Berkeley Hotel, which continues to supply a very wide range of excellent malt whiskies at a price to suit all pockets, including the taxpayer's.

"What a very pleasant cushion I'm sitting on," I observe to my lady wife, as she fingers her new prime-quality selection of Harrods bags. Order! Order! Sending the waiter off for an order of prime-quality nibbles, I place this hard-wearing cushion in one of the larger bags. It's a bit of a squeeze, but it does the job, and we walk to the limousine without interference from those with nothing better to do. Back home, I forget which, the new cushion looks very pretty indeed alongside the others.

Many of my critics in the so-called media forget what an important job I had to do. The job of the Speaker dates back many thousands of centuries, and every morning, I had to process into the Chamber, and Members and Visitors alike were honoured to catch a glimpse of this much-loved figure. As I passed them, I would hold out my hand. Whether or not they tipped me was entirely a matter for them.

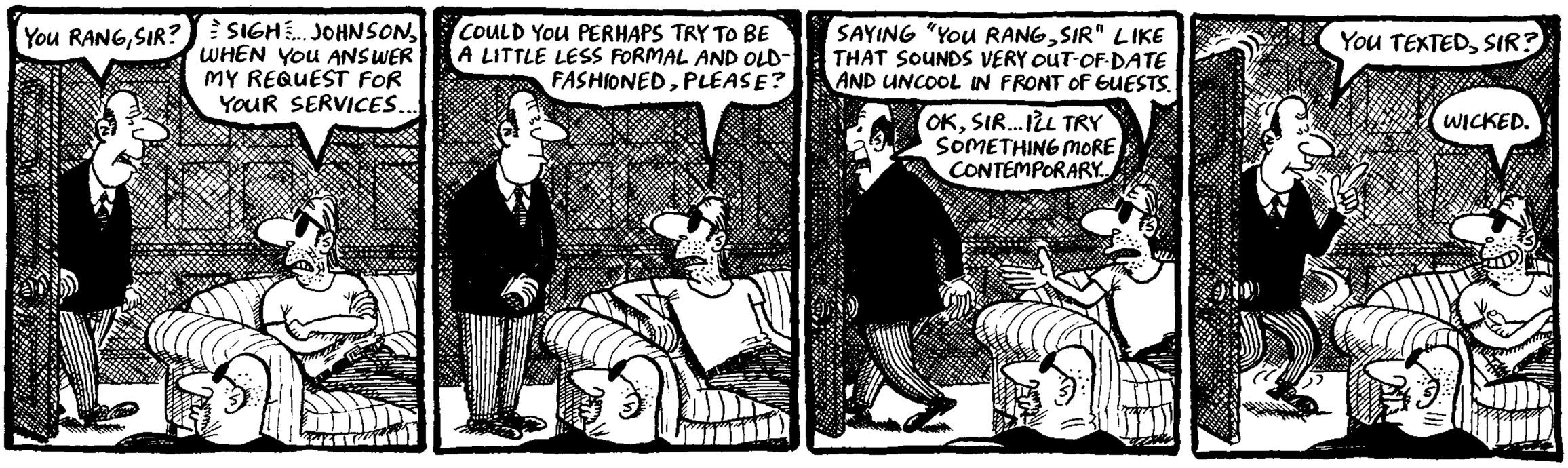
Processing into the Chamber on my very last day, it struck me, not for the first time, what a very fine piece of carpet I was on. So it was with the interests of the nation in mind that, in the early hours of the next morning, with the House deserted, I crept downstairs with a good, strong pair of carpet scissors and selflessly devoted myself to the task of cutting two modest pieces for myself, for my lady wife, for the hallways not only of our second and third homes, but also, I might add, for the country at large. Order! Order! No apologies in order!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


YOU RANG, SIR?
SIGH... JOHNSON, WHEN YOU ANSWER MY REQUEST FOR YOUR SERVICES...
COULD YOU PERHAPS TRY TO BE A LITTLE LESS FORMAL AND OLD-FASHIONED, PLEASE?
SAYING "YOU RANG, SIR" LIKE THAT SOUNDS VERY OUT-OF-DATE AND UNCOOL IN FRONT OF GUESTS.
OK, SIR... I'LL TRY SOMETHING MORE CONTEMPORARY.
YOU TEXTED, SIR?
WICKED.

Literary Review

Stars in their pies

Miss Dahl's Voluptuous Delights
Sophie Dahl
(HarperCollins, £18.99)

Fay's Family Food
Fay Ripley
(Penguin/Michael Joseph, £20)

AS ANY author will tell you, the chill wind of recession has been blowing through publishing for years. Even in the good times, publishers never had any money – not to give to authors, anyway. They simply published more and more books, many of which really didn't need to be published at all.

Now that we have a real recession to deal with, the number of books being published is falling for the first time since the birth of Caxton. This sounds like good news, until you start wondering what these publishers will be cutting back on. Proper books by proper writers on proper subjects? Or pitiful non-books by attractive celebrities they met at parties?

There being a terrible shortage of decent cookery books at the moment, you can see why HarperCollins signed up Sophie and Penguin went for Fay. There is evidence that the enormous scowling face of Gordon Ramsay scares off many potential readers who fear that they may be screamed at or physically assaulted if they put too much pepper in. Delia is getting on a bit, and Nigella can only publish one book a year.

What the market needs now, in these difficult times, is a cookery book, any cookery book at all, written by a famous woman not unknown to the readers of *Radio Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. If the book also had a unique selling point, something that genuinely separated it from all the other books out there, well, that would be great. But it's not very likely, as every possible cookery book variant has already been done a million times. And let's face it, we're bored of professional chefs telling us what to do. We'd much rather have models and actresses telling us instead.

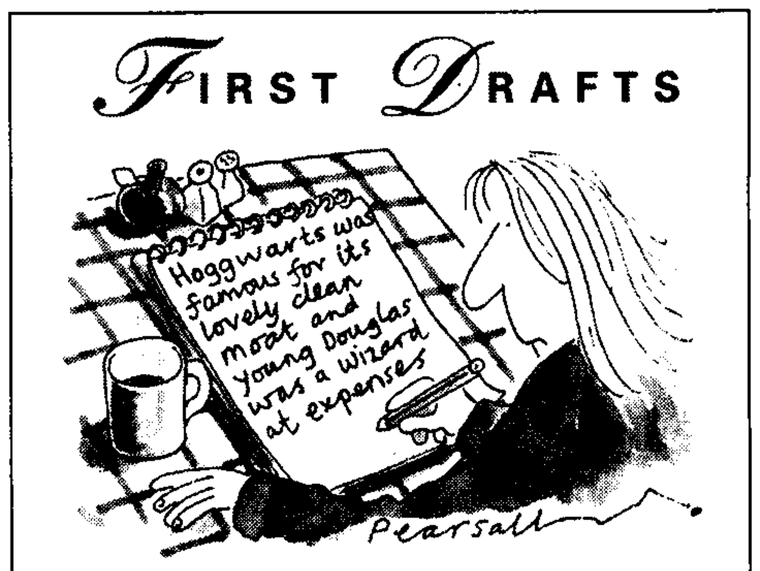
Miss Dahl's book follows the well-received publication of a novel in 2007, and is a sort of hybrid of recipe book and eating autobiography. That's the problem with chefs: they just give you the instructions. Celebs give you themselves as well, garnished with a little lifestyle porn. So at some length we learn that the Dahl family are all wonderful cooks who think of nothing but food all day long and regularly gather around groaning tables of provender listening to Nina Simone or Miles Davis: "We always joked as a family about our greediness... There was, and is, a total ease and pleasure around food and cooking."

It's all so glamorously bohemian, and illustrated with many photos of Miss Dahl herself, either grinning (when eating) or looking terribly serious (when chopping something up). The tone is relentlessly chatty – "easy-peasy", "more-ish" – but you are reminded on pretty much every page that in every way her life is more interesting and fulfilled than yours. "What a joy," says Jamie Oliver on the cover.

Fay Ripley was inspired to write her book by the experience of bringing up two small children and balancing their culinary needs with her own. (Presumably the large cheque helped bring this inspiration into focus.) This one is much more down-to-earth than Miss Dahl's – not a single mention in the text of famous relatives – but it's even more generously supplied with photos of its author grinning slightly desperately. When did authors of cookbooks start to look so deliriously happy? Nigella smiles more in a single book than she did in the whole of the 1980s. Ripley adds countless photos of her children either looking happy or eating or both.

The tone is slightly more tutty, in an organic, wholewheat, undyed-smoked-haddock kind of way, and you may not necessarily feel that your life has been enhanced by a new recipe for cheese on toast. The great revelation here, though, is that Ripley's life is also much more interesting and fulfilled than yours, but in a completely different way from Sophie Dahl's. Maybe they should have a face-off.

"Witty, fun and great recipes that work!" says Jamie Oliver on the cover. No doubt he was grinning when he wrote those words, too.



J K Rowling

Books & Bookmen

■ THE whopping tomes published by Penguin's Allen Lane imprint appear designed to win the Samuel Johnson non-fiction prize.

Usually historical or current affairs studies by academics, they often feature on Radio 4's *Start the Week*, get reviewed in the broadsheets by fellow dons (who can sometimes be heard confiding they were forced to skip, just to meet an inhuman deadline, of course), and are invariably so long you feel anyone submitting a typescript of less than 500 pages would be accused of laziness and superficiality.

Recent examples include Chris Patten's latest thoughts on the world, Tristram Hunt on Engels, Ahmed Rashid on Afghanistan, Christopher Caldwell on immigration, Richard Overy on interwar Britain and Mark Mazower's 750-pager on Hitler's empire.

Yet no Allen Lane title made even the longlist for the Samuel Johnson this year, continuing a dismal run for the Penguin group, which won the first two contests in 1999 and 2000 but has been scoreless since. What it seems not to have noticed, if prizes are part of the aim, is that in non-fiction as in fiction, judges are now impatient with books that can't be read over a weekend – the last really long Johnson victor was a Pushkin biog in 2003, and the 2008 winner by Kate Summerscale was under 400 pages (as was Andrew Brown's 2009 Orwell Prize winner).

It must all be galling for Stuart Proffitt, who oversees Penguin's brainier lists including Allen Lane; particularly as he also chairs the prize's steering committee, and so must find cold consolation in the selection process being so clearly neutral and his own role beyond reproach.

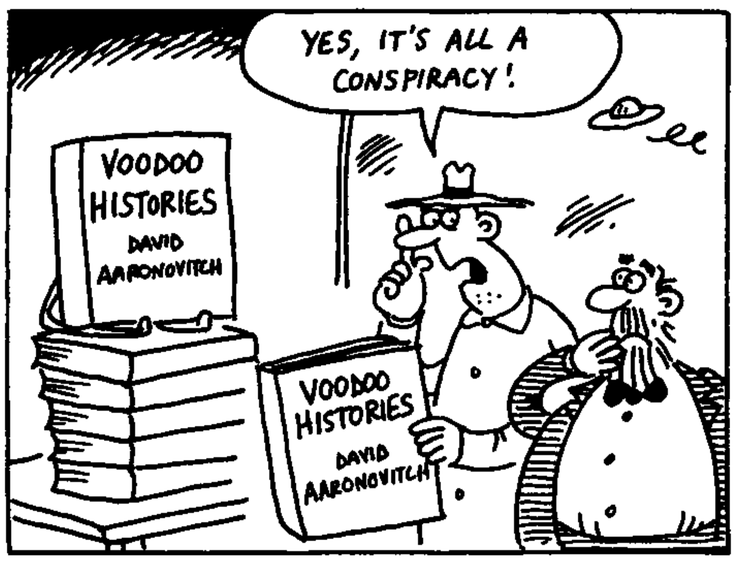
■ THE Orange Prize, to be awarded next week, is sometimes accused of reverse sexism – by AS Byatt as well as male grumps like Tim Lott – but it's also open to the charge of ageism.

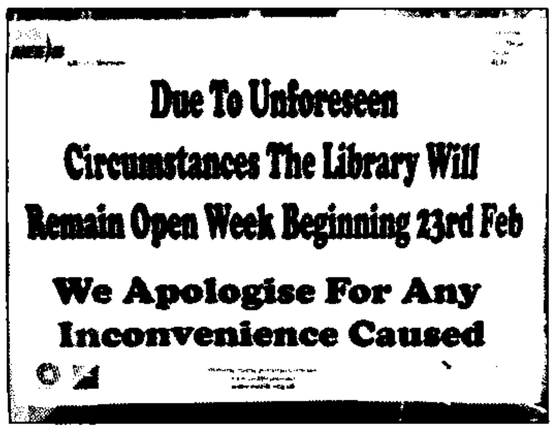
Only two novelists over 60 have won, the late Carol Shields and Rose Tremain last year, and the line-up of senior writers who have won big awards open to both sexes but not the Orange is impressive: Margaret Atwood, Joyce Carol Oates, Toni Morrison and Ursula Le Guin are among the North Americans who've failed to cut the mustard, and they're joined by such figures as Pat Barker, Beryl Bainbridge and Doris Lessing in the UK (Byatt and Anita Brookner both reportedly refuse to be submitted), India's Anita Desai and South Africa's Nadine Gordimer.

The Orange's original message was "move over, you old fart", dislodging smelly, tweedy blokes from their near-monopoly of prizes and judging panels, but "move over, grandma" soon came to be audible too, with most winners in their 30s and 40s.

One obvious cause is the selection of relatively young judges who are mostly journalists or broadcasters, omitting the senior female academics or matronly novelists favoured as judges by longer-established awards – a youth policy that came disastrously unstuck with last year's choice of Lily Allen, but is evident again in the 2009 panel in which the chairwoman, Radio 4's Fi Glover, is probably the oldest at 39. However, they have a chance to end the pattern of age discrimination by honouring an older woman for the second year running: America's Marilynne Robinson, like Tremain in her mid-60s, would be a classy contender.

'Bookworm'





Spotted in library, Coleraine

THEATRE NEWS

Cock and bald story

Grasses of a Thousand Colours

(Royal Court Theatre, London)

IN THE change of guard at the London *Evening Standard*, one of the few constants has been the articles yabbering on about the extraordinary richness and quality of London theatre.

Well, let us hope neither the paper's new Ruskie owners nor any readers brought in by the billboard apologies for the excesses of the previous regime decide to test this thesis by securing a ticket for the latest production at the Royal Court: a show accorded four stars and a hollering orgasm of praise by the rag's new man in the stalls, a pale and intense cove by the name of Henry Hitchings. Rarely has there been a play that so epitomises the pretension and excesses – the full, bum-numbing emperor's clothes syndrome – of subsidised theatre.

Grasses of a Thousand Colours is the new script – shrilly publicised as "his first for ten years" – by Wallace Shawn. He's that small, smug, bald pug of a bloke you might have seen in movies and TV series (*Gossip Girl* his latest port of call), playing a sort of lower-rent Woody Allen. For worshippers, however, that work is simply tolerated as a way of putting money in the bank.

"Wally" to cheerleaders, Shawn is Manhattan cultural aristocracy, the son of William "Bill" Shawn, revered editor of the *New Yorker*. Shawn Snr was an uptight kind of guy and so junior works this out, in a manner of public psychotherapy, by writing really filthy plays. Any porn addict or schoolkid sneaking in, though, is going to find these the hardest-won kicks of their life. Chum Shawn, see, chooses to present his erotic obsessions through the form of the multi-hour monologue, occasionally interrupted by filmic projections or mime of the kind popularised by the experimental theatre of the 1970s.

Wally's plays have never really cut it with the public, but this sensible neglect has convinced some of the more excitable luvvies in New York and London that he must be an unacknowledged genius. So the Royal Court, revered shrine to new writing, has mounted an entire season of Shawn's dramas, old and, in this one case, new.

The three-and-a-half hour long evening – this is not a misprint, ask the buttocks and spine of anyone who endured it – begins with Wally standing at a lectern in a black silk dressing gown, looking like Noël Coward trying to play William Hague. At first sight of him, there's a whoop of joy from a few acolytes in the audience, which seems risky because Wally, presumably, is supposed to be being someone else.

Well, sort of. Technically, he's playing Ben, a retired New York scientist, but the memoirs that the character now laboriously begins to read contain much of the stuff (repressive parents, brittle Manhattan cocktail parties) that are Wally's usual shtick in his monologues.

Then, inevitably, he gets his cock out: metaphorically, thankfully, but the metaphors are so extended and self-glorifying that viewers would soon have settled for a quick actual flashing. Wally's major theme – that shrimpy, wimpy men can still be dynamite in bed – is essentially Woody Allen's, but expressed in a more potty-mouthed manner. So he stands or sits on stage, delivering hymns to his "massive, powerful dick", confiding that "my erect penis is monstrous, actually".

At intervals in this interminable aria to his hard-ons, Wally brings on three attractive actresses – including, inexplicably, Miranda Richardson – who are required to roll around on a sofa pretending to snog him and then look out front and deliver their own short monologues on what Wally's towering erections do for them. One poor love has a speech describing how she set up "a shrine, almost, to the cult of the penis", bowing down in front of his awesome tower.

But that's only act one and, in the next two, things get much worse. Wally begins to describe a secret night life in which he creeps out into Manhattan and has sex with cats. At the usual laborious and self-satisfied length, he describes at least 101 uses for a live – or live until he cuts the head off one purring lover – cats. Wally exhaustingly catalogues sexual possibilities that even the most sophisticated member of the audience can rarely have contemplated: felinatio, moggylingus.

Apart from its four stars in the *Standard*, this cat-shit was praised by Billington of the *Grauniad* for his "impeccable ecological credentials" (Wally's cat-shagging brings some kind of apocalypse to New York in the final act and offers a "welcome attack on the arrogance of science".

In fact, what we have here is a demonstration of the arrogance of state-funded theatre and the credulity of critics. The hundreds of references to masturbation prove completely unnecessary: anyone in the audience not hidebound by tribal loyalty to 70s ideals of theatrical freedom will have picked Wally as a wanker within minutes.

The taxpayer is marching in the streets about MPs putting ornamental duck shelters on our tab, but at least ducks are amusing and blameless creatures. The tax dollars given to the Court have been spent on a preening and self-obsessed reptile, delivering an evening that would horrify the RSC and the RSPCA in different ways.

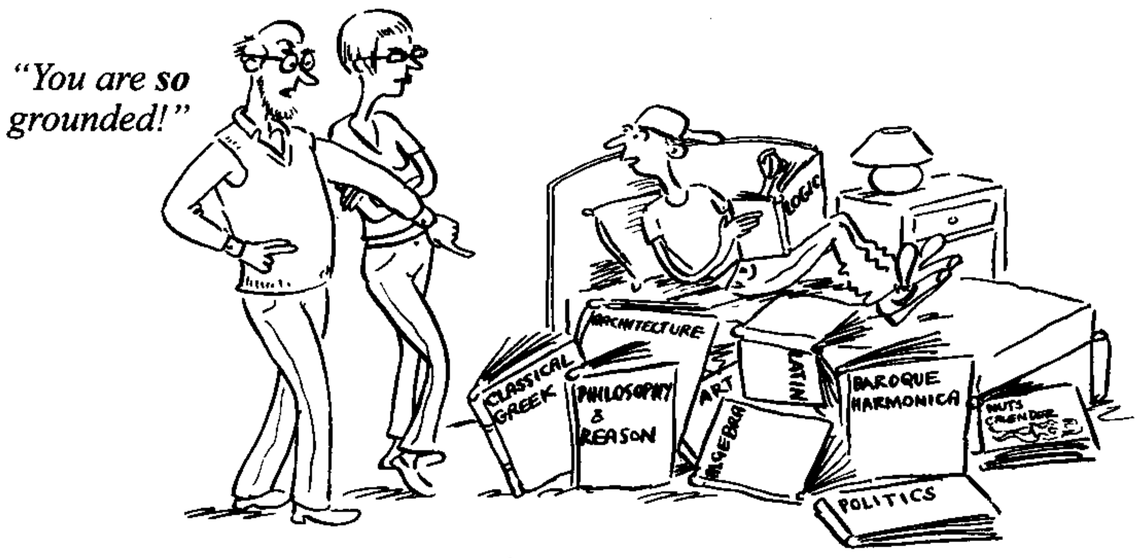
'Curtain Caller'

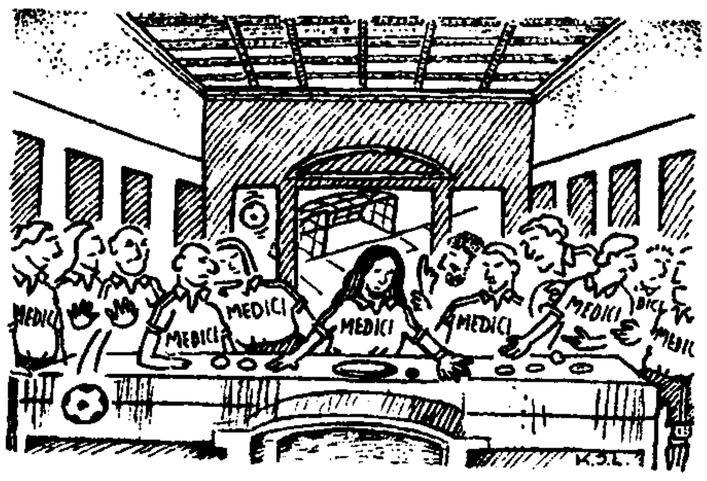
LIBRARY NEWS

■ MORE worrying news of school libraries closing and shrinking as schools embrace "virtual learning environments".

The Campaign for the Book has learned of two recent closures in Oxford and one in Kent, to add to those lost in Chesterfield and Nottingham (*Eyes passim*). Meanwhile in Lancashire, library staff have been downgraded and suffered salary cuts and school librarians face extremely tiny budgets for new material. Local authority school library support services have already shut in both London's Southwark and the Scottish Highlands.

Children's author and libraries campaigner Alan Gibbons has warned against allowing the reading culture in schools to be eroded by closing and downgrading libraries, pointing out that even prisoners have a legal right to library books.





There is nothing wrong with a Jack of all trades.

After all, Leonardo da Vinci was a musician, a writer, an architect, a man credited with designing the first helicopter and who in his spare time knocked up the Mona Lisa. Purely in an artistic sense, you understand. You name it and old Leonardo, possibly the most versatile man ever to have lived, would have had a good crack at it.

If football had existed back in the 15th century then you suspect Leonardo might have been Italy's version of Manchester United's John O'Shea…

From a syndicated article filed by the Press Association's Chief Sports Writer FRANK MALLEY

Pseuds Corner

While Hepburn may seem something of a hackneyed reference point, with everyone from Coleen to Posh citing her as their stylistic exemplar, the miscegenation of Hepburn's look being adopted by an urban girl offers a whole new aesthetic… 'I'm a whatever the hell no one else is wearing girl' she declares roundly. 'For instance, not a lot of people I know wear Tory Burch but, again, it's extreme classics. I'm like, let me go in there and see how far crazy I can bring it.'

BETHAN COLE interviews R&B star ESTELLE, *Times Magazine*

Soap is not simply a utensil for dialogue with the excluded. It is true theatre. *East Enders* is in direct line from *Aeschylus*. Indeed there is an argument to be made that soap's real life companions – Oprah, Jeremy Kyle et al – draw an equally direct line from the dialogues of Socrates, but that's best left to another time.

STEWART DAKERS *Guardian website*

As he heats milk for coffee in the side kitchen, I ask if he comes here to relax. He cuts me a withering stare. 'How disgusting,' he drawls. 'I've always thought relaxing was very common. What does it even mean?'

GILES HATTERSLEY interviews NICKY HASLAM, *The Times*

About five per cent of our clients prefer to let nature dictate when the baby is separated from the placenta, to protect the baby's aura or energy. They believe that if you cut the cord you will cut off the baby's spiritual energy and he/she will need more settling and take longer to adjust to his/her new life. In a lotus birth we leave the baby attached to the placenta until the cord drops off (usually five to ten days later). Some bury the cord where they want the child to go to university.

Director of holistic birthing centre, *Mail on Sunday You Magazine*

Contributors: Rob Preece, John Stott, Len Lavery, Josh Robinson, Claire Smith, Jeff Reynolds, Jan Rigby.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PUBS

Tied and emotional

A REPORT by the Commons business and enterprise select committee on pub companies, aka "pubcos", has at last shed light on an industry in freefall, with 40 pubs closing every week.

Pubcos are essentially greedy property companies with a cuddly name. They own nearly half the country's pub freeholds – the largest, Punch Taverns and Enterprise Inns, having some 9,000 each. Oppressive leases oblige tenants to buy beer, wine and spirits from nominated suppliers at up to twice the open-market price. The poor saps, often clutching redundancy cheques, are lured by low entry costs but soon find making a decent living almost impossible. If a tenant throws in the beer towel, there is always another sucker. In the years of booming property prices this worked well enough, but now things are different.

The select committee was not impressed by Punch and Enterprise's senior executives. The charmless Ted Tuppen of Enterprise and Giles Thorley of Punch were rebuked for having given "partial" evidence to the committee – and, in Thorley's case, having on one occasion given evidence that was "false".

The pubcos, backed by teams of lawyers and lobbyists and under the benign watch of the all-party parliamentary beer group of MPs, have avoided serious scrutiny for years. It clearly came as a shock to find that the select committee had bothered to ask 1,000 real publicans for their opinions – exactly the kind of freedom of expression that the pubco cartel, which has the trade press on side, normally pays good money to discourage.

Thorley, whose career highlights include asking a female colleague at Nomura to strip off and massage a client, is as well known for his PR skills as Tuppen, whose idea of winning hearts and minds was to call MPs "morons" ahead of the inquiry.

The committee recommended that "the tying of beers, other drinks and ancillary products should be severely limited to ensure that competition in the retail market is restored". Chairman Peter Luff may be looking to right the wrong created by the Thatcher government's disastrous "Beer Orders" of 1989, in which he was involved. The idea was to break the monopoly and anti-competitive practices of the brewers by forcing them to sell off large

holdings of pubs. Instead pubs ended up in the hands of a bunch of spivs and speculators who couldn't believe their luck in being handed a ready-made cartel where you could charge what you liked for rent and beer. Those who got in first sold out long ago and left their successors, such as Thorley and Tuppen, with billions in debt and no way of paying it back.

Greed, debt and small businesses persecuted by corporate suits? Not the sort of place you'd expect to find Sir Fred "the Shred" Goodwin, shurely? But yes: Royal Bank of Scotland is up to its overdraft limit in the pub sector. RBS piled in in 2002 and duly got fleeced by Scottish & Newcastle, paying a reputed £600m for up to 1,000 pubs legally obliged to buy beer through their landlord at inflated prices. Trebles all round!

The bank claimed its newly acquired pubs were a "secure and high-quality income stream". Many of the pubs' tenants were already struggling to make ends meet at the time of the RBS deal but, as we now know, sub-prime debt was the order of the day. Now the economy has tanked, RBS wants its £600m back and is desperate to sell. There are no takers, of course. The bank is stuck with the pubs and their, ahem, insecure and low-quality income stream.

Meanwhile Scottish & Newcastle Pub Enterprises (S&NPE), which signed up to collect the rent and flog beer to the bank's long-suffering tenants – at up to 75p per pint more than the brewer's open-market wholesale prices – is also watching its own pint go flat. S&NPE took on similar management contracts for other pub philanthropists such as Robert Tchenguiz of the Globe Pub Company and Trevor Hemmings of Trust Inns, all keen to cash in while oppressed tenants did the hard work of running the pubs.

There could be a way out of the mess. The Fair Pint Campaign, a group of publicans who actually like pubs and want the beer tie abolished, is calling on the government to use its majority shareholding in RBS to force the bank to offer commercial mortgages to individual tenants. Then they could buy RBS's unwanted pubs. Offering secure property loans to small businesses? Acting like a proper bank?

It'll never catch on.

'Publican'

LONDON OLYMPICS

Schmooze bulletin

IT SEEMS the squeaky clean London 2012 Olympic bid still required plenty of the schmoozing that has been as much a part of the build-up to any games as the torch relay.

The *Eye* has learnt that, ahead of the announcement of London's victory in July 2005, a staggering three quarters of a million pounds (excluding expenses) was budgeted for a team of fixers with intimate knowledge of elite sports officials to win over the movers and shakers on the International Olympic Committee.

Lead consultant Andrew Craig, a former executive at sports marketing company ISL, received around £21,000 per month – excluding expenses – for 21 months leading up to the bid success. Not bad for what he acknowledged was a part-time role.

Craig was helped by a cast of consultants including another graduate of the ISL world, the former British 800-meters runner John Boulter who in the 1970s and 1980s secured official contracts for ISL and its sister company, Adidas. Part of that work involved persuading voters at international sports federations to elect leaders favourable to Adidas. Boulter was involved in arranging the elections of presidents of world football at FIFA, international athletics – and the IOC.

Details of actual spending on consultants and their expenses – funded by taxpayers – are conveniently unavailable as the bid was run through a private company that has since been liquidated, with its records handed to the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, chaired by Lord Coe. This company is exempt from freedom of information laws.

All involved in the bid insist it was untainted by the brown envelope culture of years gone by. But British taxpayers have been landed with a £9bn-plus Olympic bill thanks to yet another expensive schmoozefest.

BT

Don't call him

BT's financial meltdown – £2bn profits wiped out this month by write-downs on dodgy contracts – is embarrassing for audit committee chairman Phil Hodkinson, who signed off the company's accounts over recent years as if everything were tickety-boo.

The *Eye* has long pointed out that one contract in particular, the £1bn deal for IT in the NHS across London, was shipping billions. BT denied it. Now the write-downs confirm this was indeed the case, but too late to call former chief executive Ben Verwaayen and IT boss Andy Green to account. They have long departed with bonuses safely trousered.

On the back of his experience at BT and as finance director at HBOS from 2005 to 2007 as it hurtled into the abyss, Hodkinson was this year made a director of HM Revenue and Customs, where he advises on audit and has special responsibility for ethics. This latter role should also equip him to judge his directorship of Resolution, the financial group whose real bosses – including ex-FSA boss John Tiner – refuse to be company directors, as part of an elaborate ruse to avoid tax by making the company resident in Guernsey (see *Eye* 1224).

PENSIONS

Savings & groan

IF the Royal Mail part-privatisation goes ahead, private companies will (not for the first time) get the juiciest bits of the business while taxpayers take the crap – in this case, an under-funded pension scheme.

The plan involves £24bn of pensions assets heading straight to the Treasury, while the future pension bills assumed by taxpayers – conservatively estimated at £34bn – will be treated like any other public sector pension liability and kept happily off the books.

This less-than-subtle con trick is defended by the Department for Business on the ground that paying pensions out of tax revenues rather than a funded scheme investing in the stock market will provide current and retired posties "with certainty that their benefit entitlements will be met while minimising the exposure of the taxpayer to investment risk and future volatility in the funding position of the scheme".

On its own this is a sensible approach to dealing with pensions. But it's completely at odds with the government's other great idea: the National Pension Savings Scheme (NPSS), under which, from 2012, private sector employees will be automatically enrolled on a scheme that puts their pensions at the mercy of the stock market. As recent events show, this could cost millions of people a secure retirement (even the government admits there will hundreds of thousands of losers). But it has the all-important advantage of support from the City, so it can't possibly be scrapped.

Post waste

WITH Deutsche Post dropping out of the running for the private-sector stake in the Royal Mail, only TNT and private equity company CVC are left standing.

So it's a straight choice between a serial tax dodger in TNT (*Eyes passim*) and the private equity outfit that crippled the AA. CVC cut the former mutual's workforce by 3,000 and hiked prices while response times to broken-down motorists lengthened. The man responsible, the CVC partner who became AA chief exec Tim Parker, became known as private equity's "prince of darkness". So that is what Lord Mandelson has in mind when he talks of bringing "a breath of fresh air… into the management and culture of the Royal Mail"!

HOMELESSNESS

Sofa surfing

HOMELESS 16 and 17-year-olds should not simply be handed over to council housing departments, but given proper support by children's services, the law lords ruled last week after hearing the case of a teenager who was refused support even though he was sleeping in cars.

The young man, named only as "G", was thrown out by his mother when he was 17. After a couple of months spent staying with friends or wherever he could, he approached his local council for help. The bureaucrats decided that as he didn't have any "additional needs or vulnerabilities", bed and breakfast accommodation provided by Southwark Homeless Persons Unit and referrals to other support agencies would suffice.

"It cannot seriously be suggested that a child excluded from home who is 'sofa surfing' in this way, more often sleeping in cars, snatching showers and washing his clothes when he can, is not in need," said Baroness Hale of Richmond in the ruling.

G's lawyer, Oliver Studdert, said the judgment marked a big step forward for children's rights. "The majority of 16 and 17 year olds who require accommodation have needs beyond housing," he said. "Some may come from homes they cannot return to because of irreconcilable differences and others have experienced violence, abuse or are unaccompanied minors seeking asylum with no support and nowhere to go."

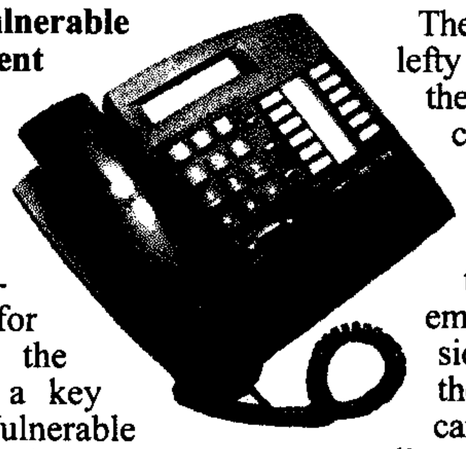
As a result of the ruling, councils must review the support given to any lone under-18s who are accommodated by their housing departments, rather than living in social services care. There are thought to be around 4,000 such young people.

PS: For young adults leaving social service care and setting up in their first flat, the allowances are not nearly so generous as those for MPs' second homes. A survey last month found that in some parts of the country, the maximum amount of help available to buy all their furniture, cooking utensils, bedding and so on is £500. According to the Care Leavers Foundation many local authorities rarely give more than £300.

GOVERNMENT HELPLINES

Hold please, we're out saucing

TELEPHONE hotlines for vulnerable workers are the latest government service to be outsourced to the private sector – despite fears that the move will put workers at risk.



The new service merges several helplines, including those for the national minimum wage, the gang-masters' licensing authority and for health and safety issues. Unifying the various employment helplines was a key recommendation of last year's Vulnerable Workers Enforcement Forum, which included the trade unions, the CBI and the Health and Safety Executive.

However, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union says the forum never recommended that the new hotline should be outsourced; and the government didn't consult properly before business secretary Lord Mandelson announced that outsourcing was a done deal, the new arrangements starting on 1 June. "Support, advice and enforcement cannot be done on the cheap and we urge Lord Mandelson to think again and keep the helpline in-house," said PCS general-secretary Mark Serwotka.

The government has refused to tell lefty backbench MP John McDonnell the anticipated value of the contract, claiming it is commercially confidential. And when he asked for the business case for out-sourcing to be placed in the House of Commons library, employment minister Pat McFadden side-stepped the question, saying the department had "looked very carefully at options" for keeping the lines in-house.

The three-year contract has gone to BSS, originally a spin-off charity from the BBC that ran helplines for TV and radio shows. It is now one of the UK's biggest call centre businesses; and while it has a decent track record, once the service is outsourced it could well be undercut by a competitor (such as the dreaded Crapita) in three years' time. Studies have found that workers in private sector call centres face low pay, poor health and safety and frequently aggressive management (not to mention the risk of having their work outsourced to India) – all things workers might want to call a hotline about.

CDC / ACTIS

It's easy money... and golf

WHEN the suits who run the publicly-owned international development fund CDC bought the business of managing its investments, as Actis, in 2004, they might have been expected to have to work quite hard to earn the millions they now trouser every year. But not a bit of it.

Speaking at a private equity conference in Washington, Actis partner and ex-CDC executive Jonathan Bond admitted: "We've had life remarkably easy over the past five years. If we haven't done well in the last five to six years, well, God help us." Happily, he needn't call for assistance from above. As the last *Eye* pointed out, in return for effectively being paid to take Actis off taxpayers' hands, up to 2007 the Actis bosses had coined in $358m ($124m more than planned in 2004), including five times more in profit shares when selling CDC investments than expected. Bond's share of this, as a co-owner of Actis, will have been huge.

So where has all easy money come from? Certainly not from helping the poor. CDC's 2008 accounts show that investment in the most developmentally productive area of "agribusiness" fell yet again, to 5 percent. Money in more profitable "consumer" businesses, on the other hand, has grown to 17 percent. No wonder a recent parliamentary inquiry found that "there is limited evidence of CDC's effects on poverty reduction" – which is what it exists for.

The latest money-spinner Actis fund managers are eyeing up for some development funds is the "Nairobi Golf City", complete with luxury hotels. Scores of other investors, including one Donald Trump, are also said to want a piece of the action. So not quite in line with CDC's stated purpose of investing "where others are generally unwilling to do so".

Last month the UN called yet again for more investment in agriculture to combat increasing food insecurity. CDC is sitting on £1.4bn cash that might have come in handy for this. Shame it and the Actis men have already committed the money to hotels, take away food chains and other similarly worthwhile investments.

SIMON SINGH CASE

Scientists arise!

THE libel courts' treatment of Simon Singh is spreading fear and anger in equal measure, and raising the possibility that England's legal establishment will be hit by the incredulous fury of the scientific establishment.

As the last *Eye* reported, the alternative therapists at the British Chiropractic Association are suing Singh for saying that its claims to be able to treat colic, asthma, ear infections and sleeping and feeding problems in children were "bogus". Instead of allowing Singh to provide evidence that chiropractic did no good to children, Mr Justice Eady insisted that he must prove that the BCA was being consciously dishonest and knowingly promoting quack treatments – an impossible requirement.

Eady refused Singh leave to appeal. As the *Eye* was going to press, his lawyers were considering if they could go to the appeal court anyway. Scientists and Singh's fellow science writers are begging him to fight because the stakes for research in Britain are so high.

Sense about Science, a charitable trust dedicated to reversing public misconceptions about science, will launch a campaign under the slogan "Keep the Libel Law out of Science". It hopes to sign up 50 heads of research institutes and university departments, along with Britain's leading science writers.

The BCA is suing Singh personally, rather than the *Guardian*, which published his article. As a result, officials from Sense about Science say they are now finding it harder to persuade academics to speak out against potentially dangerous practices. For example, after the BCA began its legal action, Sense about Science tried to get doctors to respond to claims in newspaper articles by tennis commentator Annabel Croft that homeopathy had helped make an ovarian cyst vanish. Ordinarily doctors and researchers would happily say there is no evidence that homeopathy can cure anything. Now they cite the Singh case and say that if alternative therapists are going to use the law against their critics, they cannot afford to put their homes and savings on the line by speaking out.

At a rally in support for Singh in central London, speakers emphasised that science depends on peer review and open debate. Stopping questioning of alleged medical treatments would endanger patients' lives.

Singh is not the first science writer to be targeted by libel lawyers. Vitamin magnate Matthias Rath sued the *Guardian*'s Ben Goldacre for condemning his claims that his pills could cure Aids. Although Rath abandoned the case, for months British writers could not discuss phoney treatments for an Aids epidemic, which was sweeping Africa. As we reported two issues ago (*Eye* 1235), the US firm NMT Medical is suing Dr Peter Wilmshurst of Shrewsbury hospital for criticising its treatment for holes in the heart.

Condemnations by the US Congress and United Nations of English libel law have passed virtually unnoticed in Britain, but the hounding of Singh has provoked a loud campaign against authoritarian courts and legal costs only wealthy organisations can afford.

As Graham Lawton, deputy editor of *New Scientist*, wrote after the ruling: "I once believed I lived in a country where freedom of speech and freedom of the press could be taken for granted. I now know I was wrong. The Simon Singh libel case has made me think that England has the most restrictive, repressive and illiberal libel laws of any country in the English-speaking world. These bad laws are being exploited, often by rich and powerful foreigners, to silence people they dislike. Anyone who cares about liberal values and freedom of expression - and that includes good, questioning science journalism - ought to be scandalised by what is going on."

'Ratbiter'

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

THE OSCAR-WINNING screenwriter William Goldman famously summed up those who run Hollywood in the phrase "Nobody knows anything". It's a description that also fits central bankers such as Bank of England governor Mervyn King and his US counterpart Ben Bernanke when it came to assessing the risks of the asset and credit bubbles they did nothing to prevent.

Consider the Bank of England's estimate just over a year ago – post-Bear Stearns but before Lehman Brothers – that the losses to banks from mainly sub-prime mortgage-backed securities were exaggerated and would be a mere $170bn. So said the now former deputy governor Sir John Gieve when discussing the Bank's then latest Financial Stability Report. Federal Reserve Bank chairman Bernanke's earlier estimate in February 2008, before Bear Stearns, had been much more pessimistic – up to $500bn. These projections compared with a post-Bear Stearns estimate by the International Monetary Fund of almost $1,000bn.

Last month the IMF published its latest estimate of the losses faced by financial institutions from the impact of the credit crunch-induced global recession. Its new number: $4,100bn. As Goldman says, nobody knows anything. But central bankers are supposed to be a little more financially savvy than Hollywood studio bosses.

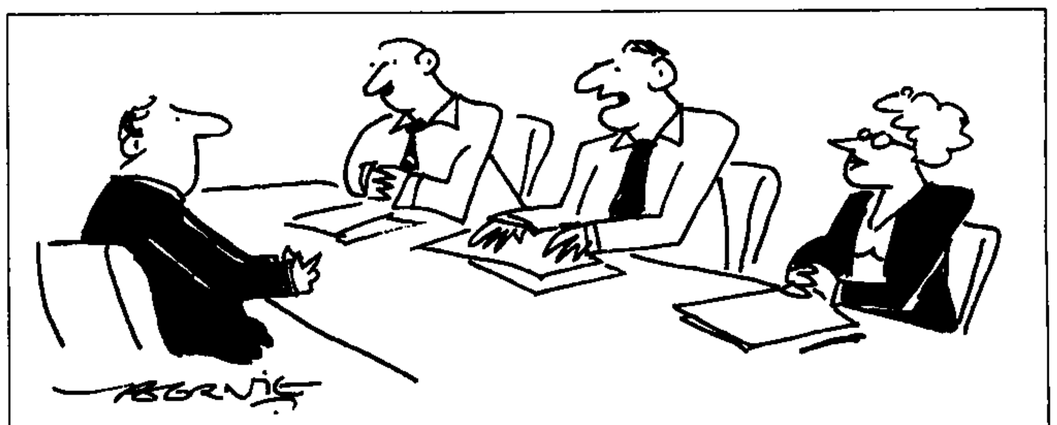
FINANCIAL regulators in four countries should start paying more attention to the activities – or in certain cases, lack of activities – of the grandly named MCC Global, a self-styled private equity group which once boasted among its advisory board members such luminaries as Tory peer Lord Parkinson, former EMI boss Eric Nicoli and ex-Cable & Wireless CEO Rod Olsen.

MCC, which has featured in a number of AIM issues, was among the original backers of London 2012 chairman Lord Seb Coe's Complete Leisure Group, which owns the rights to the Olympic gold medallist's name and image. That relationship soured when MCC failed to repay a loan.

Run by one-time Goldman Sachs banker Tony Moore and his business partner, American Sharon Clayton, MCC once boasted offices in Mayfair, France, South Africa and across the USA. But it is now reduced to an outpost in Salt Lake City. The offices in London became smaller and smaller and have now disappeared.

So far this year MCC Global has published not one, but two sets of unaudited accounts for 2007 (initially promised in July last year) and 2008 – unaudited it appears because the company may not currently have any auditors! And the picture presented by even those unaudited 2008 accounts suggests that the company's future may be all behind it. MCC had cash of just $219,000 last December against trade debts of $5m and overdue loan notes of $12m.

Both the Dutch regulator AFM (MCC Global is a Dutch company) and the German regulator BAFIN (MCC is listed on the Frankfurt stock market) confirm they require that companies publish only audited accounts and have external auditors. AFM had already raised questions last year about the 2006 accounts, which were audited.



"We feel that the very generous salary on offer is commensurate with the criticism you'll receive for being grossly overpaid"

The MCC Global picture has been further confused by the sudden collapse last month of talks for a proposed reverse takeover by Omagis, a newly created Gibraltar-registered but London-based financial services company connected to Australian Phillip Cook. He attracted attention with the takeover of the Unwins off-licence chain which collapsed in 2005, leaving administrators KPMG in pursuit of directors on behalf of creditors.

Meanwhile, the FSA-regulated Moore, Clayton UK last week faced being struck off having failed to file any accounts – the 2007 edition was due last October – along with another British MCC company. Former MCC executives claim they have been unpaid and there are suggestions that a leading City law firm is owed a six-figure sum.

Moore, who is also registered with the Fundamentally Supine Authority, and Clayton own some 25 percent of MCC. Another large shareholder is American lawyer Kenneth Denos, who also acts as MCC's Salt Lake City landlord.

Remarkably, despite recent events, MCC still retains a listing on the Frankfurt stock market – where it is not so much a penny stock as a mini-fractions-of-a-euro stock. Furthermore, other MCC subsidiaries are regulated by the Securities & Exchange Commission as brokers and an investment adviser – MCC manages the struggling Equus Total Return fund.

MCC started as Moore, Clayton some ten years ago. It had some early AIM success with Healthcare Enterprise (listing now suspended) and Tersus Energy (no longer on AIM) but soon began to burn more money than it made, assisted by the lifestyles of its principals. In 2007 Moore, Clayton completed a protracted reverse takeover of the Dutch company IFEX, which had a Frankfurt listing. The deal was done on the basis of the IFEX shares being valued at 16 cents. It has been all downhill since then, despite regular announcements of exciting deals, such as the $3.5bn joint venture with the owners of Bahrain's Formula One circuit for a centre of excellence, about which little good is then heard.

IFEX transpired to be a crock – all its so-called assets had to be written off, which says a lot for the Moore, Clayton due diligence. MCC wrote off $18m in 2007. It has since also written down to zero the supposed Moore, Clayton "goodwill" value. Revenues fell from $13m in 2006 to just $2.6m, according to last year's unaudited accounts. The company – motto: "generating profitability from advising, building and investing in growth companies" – lost $39m in three years, although how accurate any of these figures are is hard to say, given that the 2007 and 2008 accounts are unaudited.

MCC was previously audited by the Dutch branch of Mazars. However, they resigned earlier this year – it is said that fees were an issue. In February MCC announced that it was "in the process of appointing" the small London firm Clarkson Hyde to replace them. Whether that ever happened is unclear. Clarkson Hyde did not respond about its relationship with MCC.

The lack of an auditor may help to explain why MCC admits in its 2008 accounts that, contrary to the requirements of the Dutch regulator, an external auditor did not attend the last annual meeting of shareholders in March or the meeting of the supervisory board – Moore and A.N. Other after the resignations of Charles Balfour and George Warren in November 2007 – to discuss the 2007 or 2008 accounts.

The precarious nature of MCC Global's finances is clear even from the unaudited accounts. Liabilities, at $40m, dwarf assets of $12m. During 2008 creditors accepted 209m shares in settlement of debts. One of the largest creditors is believed to be the New York investment managers Elliott Associates, which is owed around $12m from notes that were due for repayment almost two years ago and are now in default.

MCC also faces a claim for €6m in unpaid tax from the Dutch authorities, which it is disputing.

However, MCC appears to have settled – for shares and cash – an embarrassing civil action brought in New York in which it was accused of falsely "puffing" shares in Centurion Gold Holdings during 2005, when the South African miner had abortive takeover discussions with the later AIM-listed MinMet.

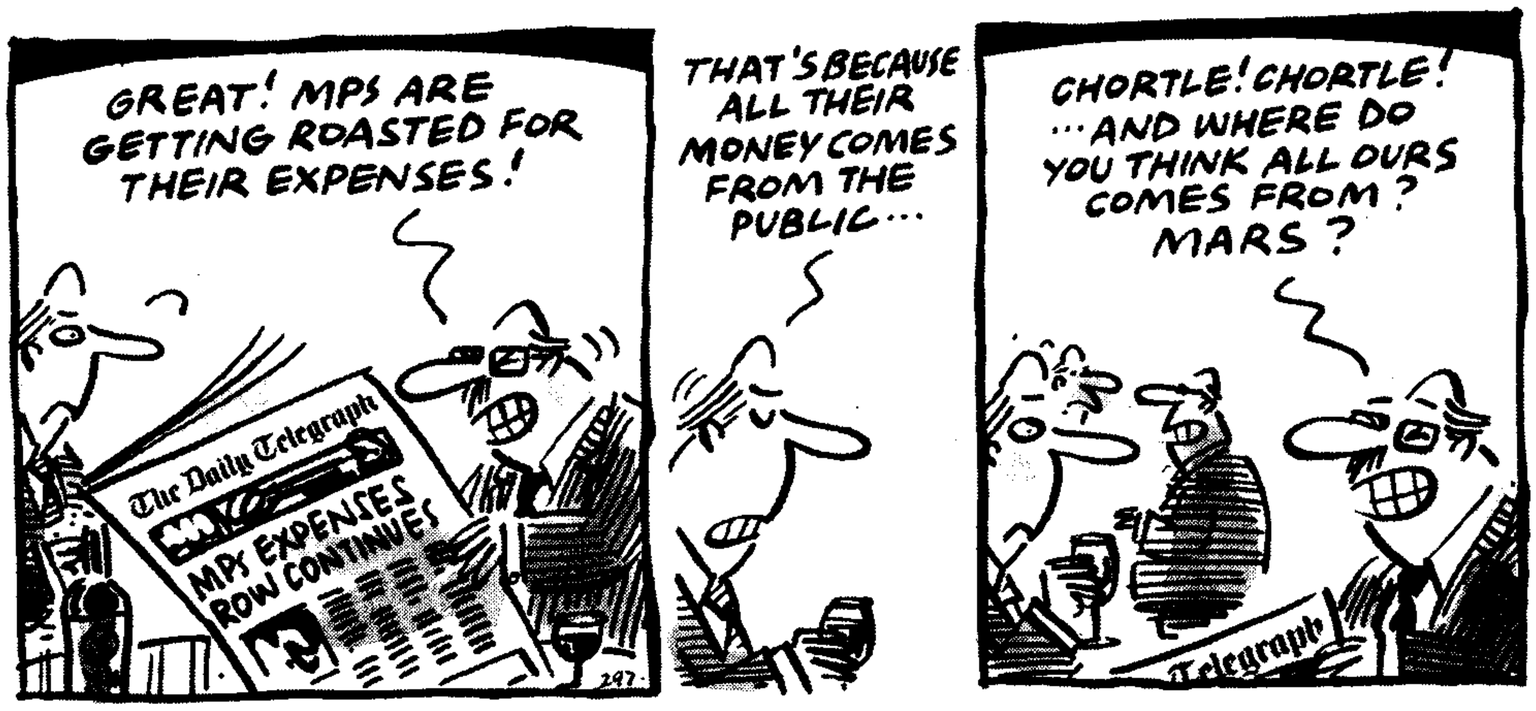
Equus Total Return fund has not suffered as badly as other MCC Global investments. But the quarterly report to end-December disclosed that assets had fallen from $94m to $78m – a year earlier, they had been $103m. They have since gained $1m. Equus had to write off most of its $9m investment in a golf club company. The fund is also an investor in Metic Group, the glass roof supplier that has seen its shares slump by two-thirds since joining AIM last December.

Metic is headed by Irish businessman Philip Marley, who, with his backer, London property man Laurence Davis, was also an investor in Lord Coe's Complete Leisure Group. They were members of the "fan club" for serial failed financier Peter Abbey, who raised the £1m for CLG. MCC was at one time keen to do other deals with Abbey, including taking a portfolio of his greatest hits in return for shares. The deal did not go through. Moore became a director of AIM-listed Valirx, which emerged from an Abbey "shell".

CLG gave an early indication of the problems at MCC. Through a US company, whose address turned out to be a Malibu mailbox, Moore Clayton invested £225,000 in 2005. But when CLG failed to achieve the flotation Abbey had promised, Moore Clayton demanded its money back. Told this was impossible, as it had invested in shares rather than loans, remarkably CLG still agreed to lend back the £225,000 on the agreement that this would be repaid in December 2006. This was extended until March 2008 but

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


GREAT! MPS ARE GETTING ROASTED FOR THEIR EXPENSES!
The Daily Telegraph
MPs EXPENSES ROW CONTINUES
THAT'S BECAUSE ALL THEIR MONEY COMES FROM THE PUBLIC...
CHORTLE! CHORTLE! ...AND WHERE DO YOU THINK ALL OURS COMES FROM? MARS?
Telegraph

MCC declared it could only repay £150,000, so CLG wrote off £75,000. But then last year CLG had to write off the remaining £150,000 due to "uncertainty over the recoverability". MCC insiders wonder who actually invested that £225,000 in the Coe company initially, as there was no trace of the investment in the MCC documentation for the IFEX deal. They also wonder why CLG was so generous and did not take legal action to recover its money. Maybe it figured there would be nothing to recover – a common view among creditors, say some with knowledge of the MCC finances.

Appropriately, Equus is also an investor in the company behind the Ripley's Believe It or Not! museum in Piccadilly Circus.

Attempts to discuss MCC Global with its directors were unsuccessful, but perhaps shareholders will have more success. They have been invited to the annual meeting at a hotel at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport on 11 June. No doubt the location is inspired by chairman Moore's closing exhortation in his annual report of "Onward and Upward" – a motto more fitting for MCC directors' travel plans than the company.

PLANET FOOTBALL

Arsenal

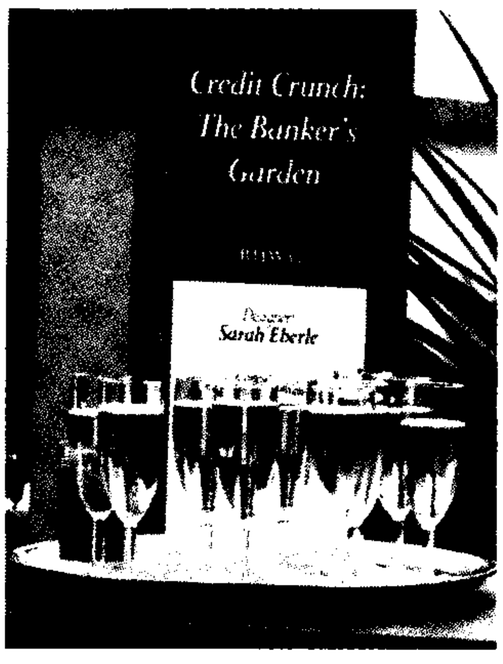
THE mystery over what is happening off the pitch at Arsenal grows, as the major shareholders continue to manoeuvre to ensure control without having to raise the funds for a full bid.

American Stan Kroenke earlier this month raised his stake to 28 percent by buying out the Carr family for more than £41m to add to the £42.5m he paid for part of co-director Danny Fiszman's holding in March. Kroenke paid up to £10,500 a share, compared with the current price of £6,500. So both the Carrs and Fiszman have locked in big premiums for their shares. But, as with the Fiszman shares, it is clear that Stan the Man has paid with borrowed funds, as there are no fewer than three charges on the ex-Carr shares to go with the one charge to Fiszman over the ex-Fiszman shares. Hardly evidence that Stan could personally find the £10,500 a share, or £450m cash, he would now need to pay for a full bid for the shares he does not own.

Shopping centres and sporting franchises in the US are hurting badly right now and banks are not keen to extend their exposure. But then the same probably goes for the financial firepower of his 25 percent Russian rival Alisher Usmanov. And Silent Stan's pal Philip Anschutz, owner of the O2 Arena and David Beckham, says he is not interested in joining in.

Meanwhile, the Nelsonian Takeover Panel does not see any concert party in the moves which have seen Kroenke more than double his shareholding with the help of the anti-Usmanov forces led by Fiszman, who still owns 16 percent. Any concert party with over 30 percent would have to bid. Which leaves an unsatisfactory stand-off until either a bidder who does not need a bank comes along or loans for football clubs become mentionable again in either the US or Russia.

'Slicker'



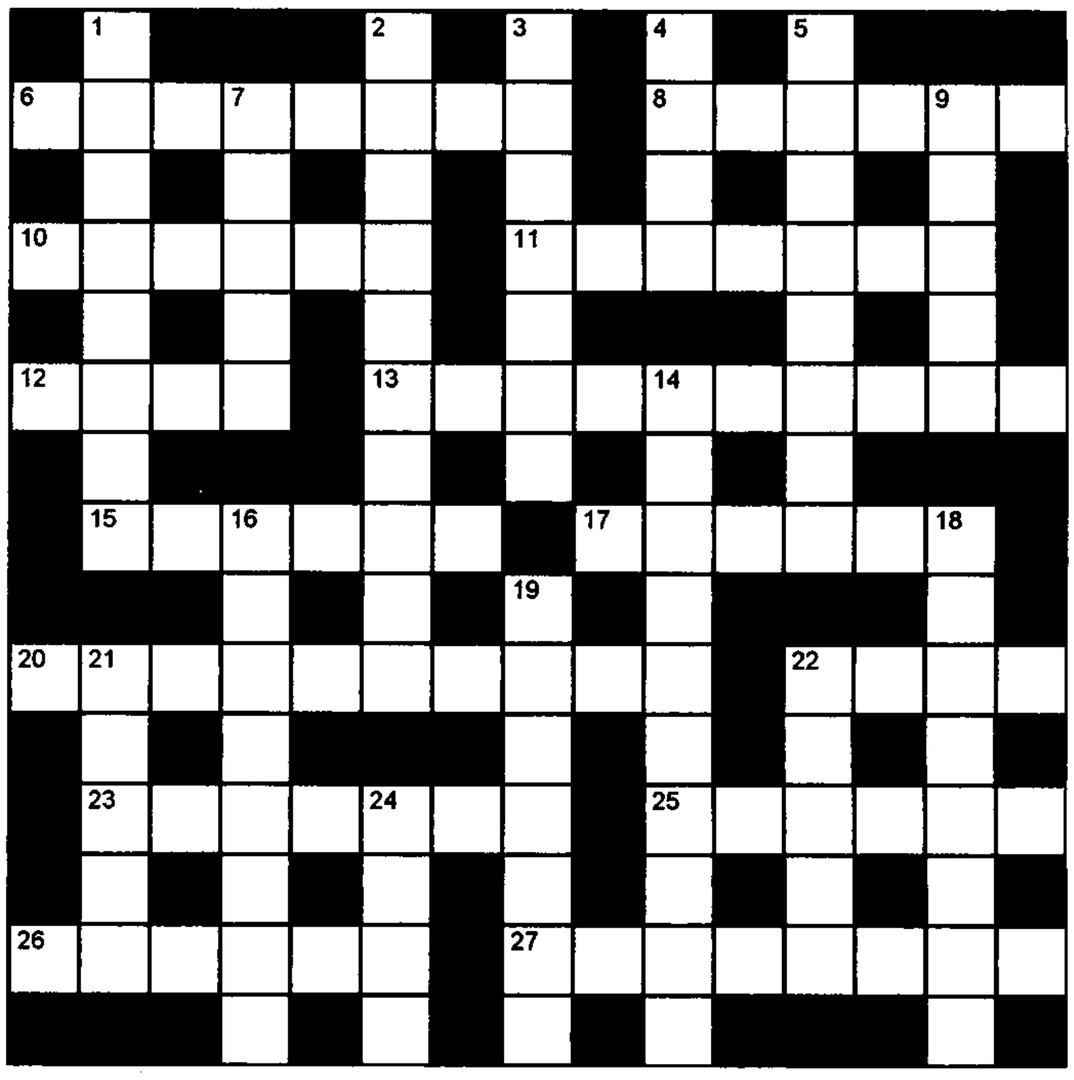
I-SPY

Chelsea Flower Show

Submitted by Cath Bozeat.

EYE CROSSWORD 392

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 5 June 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

6 Fancy Jack Straw's introductions, do we? No! (A low indicator of present depressed times) (3,5)

8 *Sun* restrained?! It shows the turmoil (6)

10 Hillary's first broadcast act, shock style (6)

11 Mark again has, er, bent over Michael (7)

12 See 4dn.

13 Back-stabbed e.g. David Cameron, being disrespectful (10)

15/17/23 Fickle public's changed opinion of Obama? Expect mean behaviour from now on (2,4,6,4,3)

20 "Bum hair as well," declared gay (4,3,3)

22 Things agreed: removing tip of penis has an effect (4)

23 See 15ac.

25 Boom means heads of merchant banks breaking injunction (6)

26 Shorts accepted by defenders (6)

27 Follower of Nick Brown's inside as it's gone pear-shaped (8)

DOWN

1 Sounds like Dick O'Front's a dish (3,2,3)

2 Sadly no lady (the sort Thatcher was) – rather old-fashioned air (3,3,4)

3 *Private Eye* takes on City, Brenda and Santander's main shady lenders (7)

4/12 Feeling bad following party? Shun government's division (4,4)

5 Gordon really starts to chomp – idiot gets the bird (5,3)

7 Judgemental type Jack "upset our party's centre" (5)

9 Streak, everything off, small organ (5)

14 Glam celebs refuse one when collared by stupid git (10)

16 Guy with laces undone as a bondage aid? (8)

18 Callous as Brown's cabinet was when Kelly went (8)

19 Cameron's brand of politics will bring you to dire, energy-drained misery! (7)

21 British forsaking Brown – about over, he admits (5)

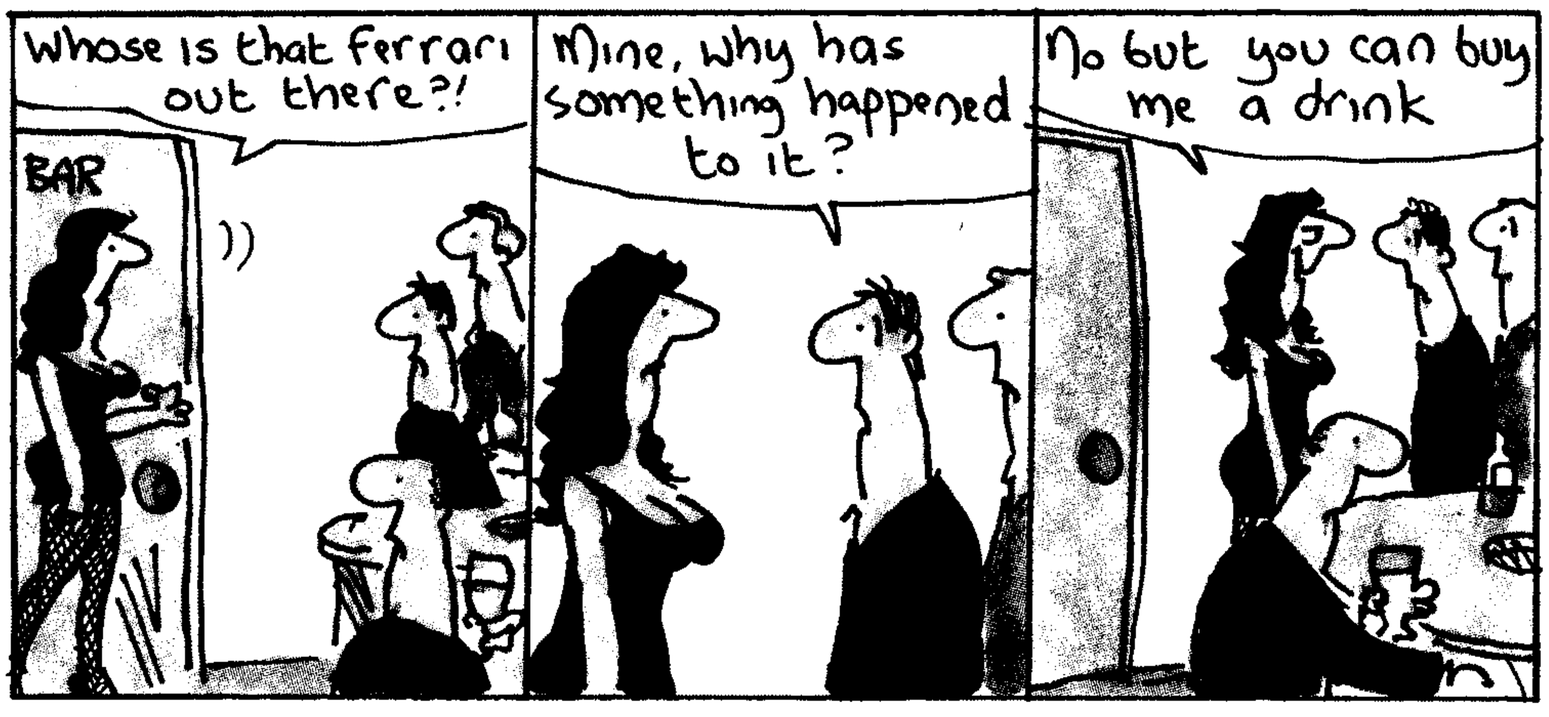
22 Cruising Med in one? They'll supply plugs (5)

24 Personal ad requirement: "heart transplant needed" – bloody hell! (4)

Crossword 391 winner: VICTORIA BARKER

ACROSS: 9 Off-days 10 Novella 11 Loincloth 12 Ritzy 13/15 Tears a strip off 17 Rabbi 19 Dumbo 22/6 Leg-over 23 Moneylender 25/8 First Lady 27 Catacombs 28 Charlie 29 Cologne.
DOWN: 1/24 Collateral damage 2 Africa 3 Narcissism 4 Espouse 5 In short 7 Platform 14 Padded cell 16 Flourished 18 Big break 20 Knocker 21 Mystics 25 Fact 26 Talc.

HUSBAND



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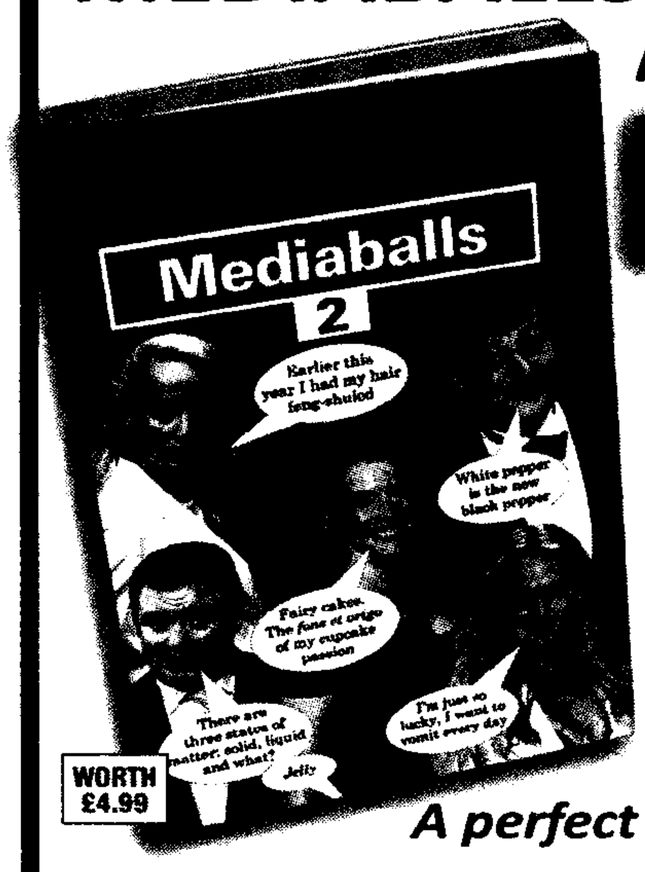
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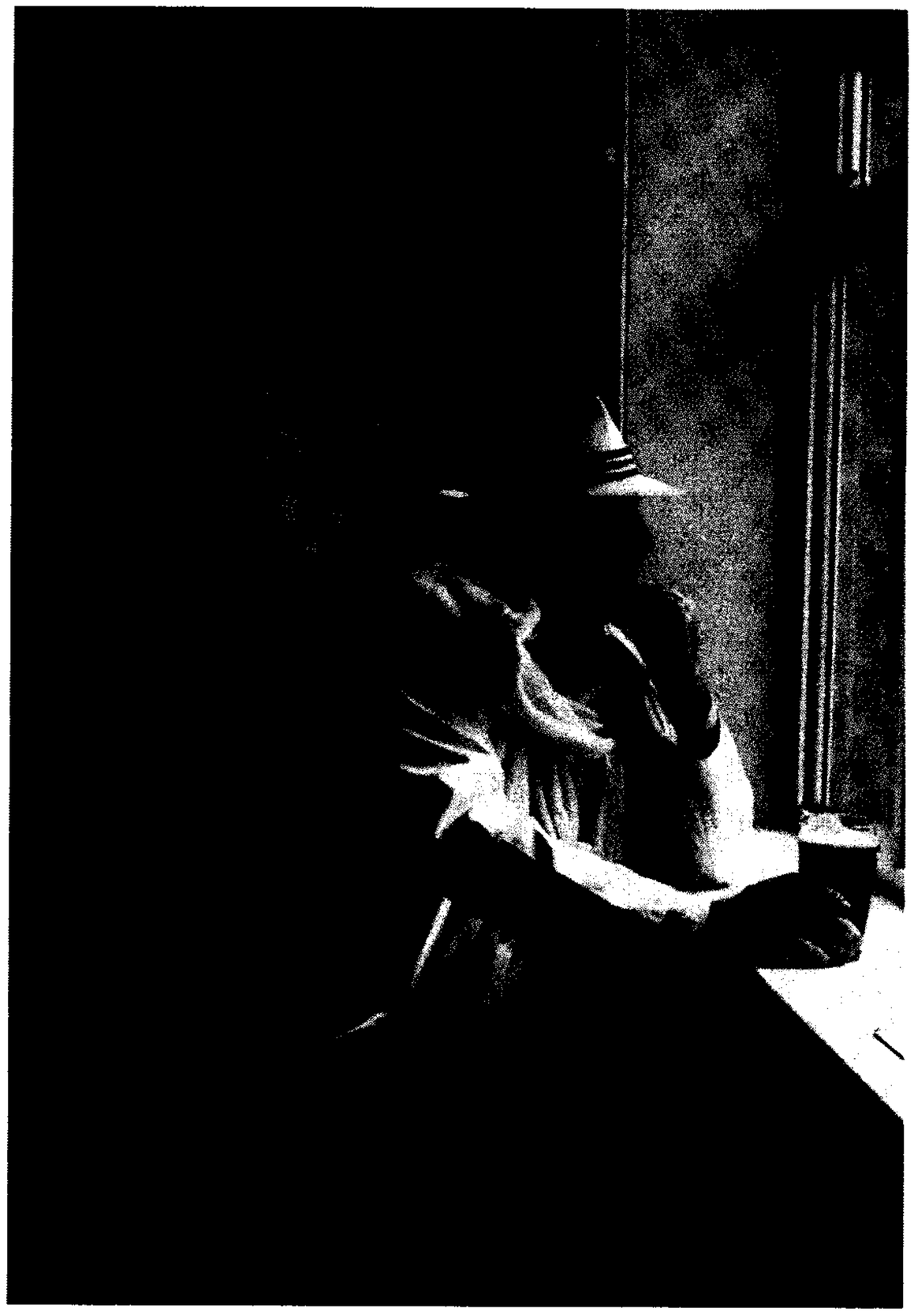

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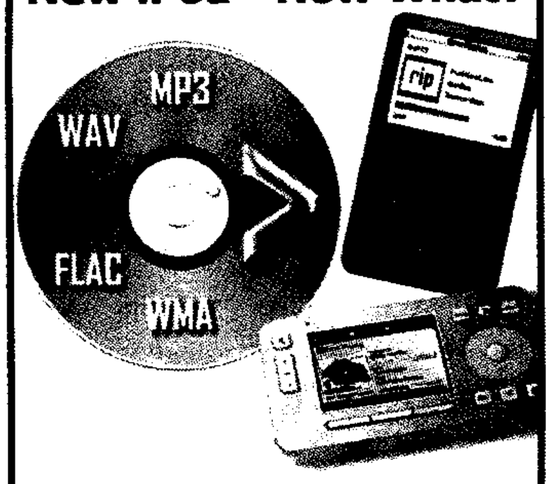

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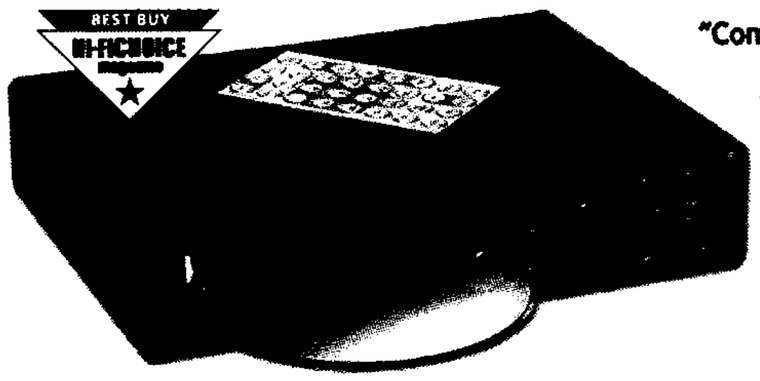

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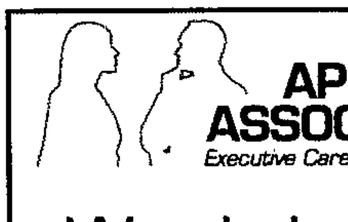

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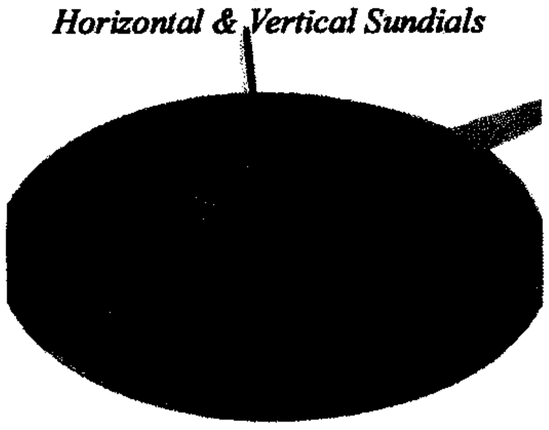

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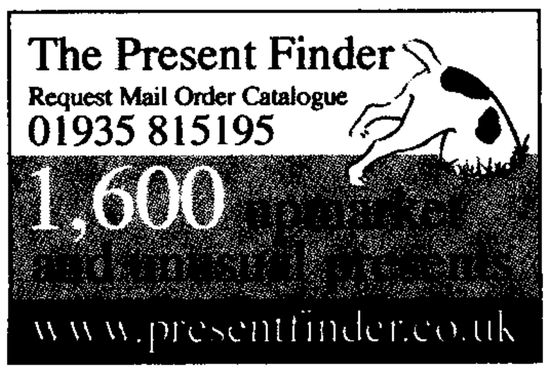

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OM SAI RAM

Don't join the recession – beat it!

Looking 'the business' more important now than ever, says bespoke tailoring king.

It's the question every professional man and woman on the planet is asking right now; what is the best way to present yourself when doom and gloom are in a neck and neck race for world domination?

More specifically, just how 2009 is sackcloth and ashes as a businesswear look? Read the media in anywhere in the world, and you could only conclude that with the way things are going, the hair shirt, preferably with worn-out shoes and a frayed collar will be only appropriate fashion for the coming year.

But Hong Kong's pre-eminent master tailor Raja Daswani, the man now hailed globally as the world's leading authority on the smart, perfectly fitting, exquisitely-made – yet amply affordable - suit, begs to differ. 'Dressing for success has never been more important than in these days of recession and depression,' he says.

'An immaculate suit practically hypnotises people,' explains the man whose passion for fashion has transformed the wardrobes – and the lives - of hundreds of thousands of men and women worldwide. 'Without making its point loudly or brashly, a fine suit argues with unswervable conviction that its wearer is supremely competent, totally in control and has impeccable taste.'

'These above all are the qualities you need to prosper in these difficult times. You look good, feel good, be good and, ultimately, do good.'

'A good, hand-made bespoke suit is as effective as a superb c.v. at giving a good impression. A perfect suit makes your point for you, but subtly. Nobody is resistant to the message a great suit conveys.'

'The effect – some even call it the Raja magic suit effect - is strangely contagious,' he continues.

'People are drawn to well presented people. By contrast, sadly, nobody likes to do business with or associate with people who look like a walking recession. I think there's a feeling that it's catching.'

'I am so convinced by my decades of experience of making fantastic suits at a crazily low price that I virtually guarantee a Raja suit will change your life for the better,' Mr. Daswani concludes.

And because he wants more people to look good and do good in today's challenging world, Mr Daswani's suit empire, Raja Fashions, is pitching into the recession with a couple of incredible offers.

It's not just the unbeatable price of a Raja Fashions suit. (We are talking £169 for a fully made-to-measure summer suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £325 for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand-finished suit in a British or Italian cloth, with every refinement from hand-made buttonholes to knee lining, exotic jacket linings and double thickness pockets.) Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500, costs a third less than it would on Savile Row.

But first off in Mr Daswani's Recession Special Package, he is offering one free hand made-to-measure shirt free with every suit you purchase.

Secondly, special for 2009, he is pledging to give a proportion of the (already amazing) price of each custom-cut, hand-stitched suit he sells to charity.

While you are very welcome to make your way to bustling Cameron Road, Kowloon to visit Raja Fashions' store, the store will equally come to you – in cities all over the world, several times a year. Thanks to the magic of technology, Mr Daswani and his team can measure you up for the full Hong Kong Monty without your needing to travel often further than your nearest big city. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 10,000 miles away before you've even left his mobile sales suite. You can have it sent by courier within a week or so if it's urgent – or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

Over the past thirty soaringly successful years, the Raja suit revolution, with its inspired mix artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, has practically seen off the traditional, ill fitting, robot-finished off the peg British high street suit.

Whether you're attracted by quality, style, price, or sheer convenience, a Raja Fashions suit is the perfect sartorial solution to tough times.

But be warned. Mr Daswani doesn't do sackcloth.

Or ashes.

Business hours 10am - 8pm
(by appointment only)
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Details of our up and coming tours can be found on www.raja-fashions.com

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